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(54) Title: APPARATUS, SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR ONLINE, MULTI-PARCEL, MULTI-CARRIER, MULTI-SERVICE PARCEL RETURNS SHIPPING MANAGEMENT

(57) Abstract:



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1 APPARATUS, SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR ONLINE,  
2 MULTI-PARCEL, MULTI-CARRIER, MULTI-SERVICE  
3 PARCEL RETURNS SHIPPING MANAGEMENT  
4

5 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

6 The field of the present invention is computer systems for shipping management, and  
7 specifically online computer systems for parcel returns shipping management.  
8

9 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 Electronic commerce (sometimes referred to herein as "eCommerce") is a growing  
11 sector of the U.S. and world economy. As with traditional brick and mortar purchases,  
12 eCommerce purchasers sometimes desire to return one or more of the items purchased.  
13 eCommerce purchasers are sometimes dissatisfied with the procedure with which eCommerce  
14 merchants provide for returning eCommerce-purchased merchandise.

15 Electronic Commerce returns and exchange processing has been inefficient for both the  
16 consumer and the online merchant. Electronic Commerce consumers have experienced slow,  
17 inconvenient, clumsy returns and exchange processes online. The experience contrasts sharply  
18 with consumer expectations that returning a product online should be as easy as ordering it  
19 online.

20 Many eCommerce merchandisers use a return authorization system for processing  
21 eCommerce-purchased merchandise returns. Unfortunately, return authorizations can often be  
22 difficult for the consumer to obtain and can take a long time to receive. In some cases, online stores  
23 require customers to call a customer service center to request a return authorization. Calling  
24 customer service for a return authorization is inconsistent with an online shopper's preference for  
25 doing business online.

26 Some online merchants, on the other hand, require shoppers to compose a return email  
27 request. As yet another alternative, some online merchants provide return instructions on the back  
28 of a packing slip, but may not accept return of every item in the shipped order.

29 After authorizing a return, the online merchant mails out an Authorized Return Service  
30 label, such as a UPS Authorized Return Service label. This return authorization process results in a  
31 slow return and refund or exchange.

32 Refunds for returned items are often cumbersome and can take weeks to appear in the  
33 returning shopper's payment card accounts. Exchange requests can take even longer, especially if  
34 the exchange item is out of stock.

1       Once a return is authorized and the customer has all of the necessary paper work, returning  
2       the item is not necessarily an easy matter for the consumer. Even if the returning customer has  
3       retained the box and packing materials for the item to be returned, most online stores do not provide  
4       an easy way for customers to pass the return package to a carrier. Some merchants provide UPS call  
5       tags inside each box they ship.

6       It would sometimes be more convenient for customers to return or exchange merchandise at  
7       a brick and mortar store. However, physical brick and mortar stores may not accept returns from  
8       their online siblings.

9       eCommerce-purchased merchandise returns can also be a problem for online merchants. An  
10      inefficient returns and exchange process that causes individual customer dissatisfaction may result  
11      in online shopper defection to online stores that provide higher-quality return and exchange services.

12      The various methods mentioned above of providing returns and exchange services are  
13      inefficient for both the merchant and the returning consumer. Processing return and exchange  
14      requests by telephone requires the online merchant to provide expensive facilities, staff, and  
15      training. Furthermore, a customer service call center cannot match the convenience of the Internet  
16      for an online shopper. Return requests by email, telephone, and paper forms are collected with  
17      manual processes and/or in non-standard formats. This makes generating returns reports an  
18      expensive data-collection chore which is subject to the judgment of individual customer service  
19      reps.

20      Further, the manual returns and exchange processes described above do not necessarily  
21      provide online merchants with returns information in a timely manner. For example, merchants  
22      may not know a return is coming until the returned package arrives. The return might be due to  
23      defective merchandise or poor packaging that caused breakage. While the first return shipment is in  
24      transit, the merchant continues to ship defective or poorly-packaged merchandise.

25      Each online merchant has its own policy regarding returns and exchange processing. For  
26      example, many merchants are willing to pay for all return shipping to provide high-quality service.  
27      Other merchants are willing to pay for some return shipments, but not for expensive or ill-justified  
28      returns. Still other merchants want to accept all or some returns but are not willing to pay for their  
29      return shipment.

30      According to one commentator, "[t]here's no easy way to solve the problem [of returns].  
31      Internet companies fall apart on this." (Melissa Barnes, The Yankee Group, in Internet World,  
32      August 15, 1999.) Therefore, in order for eCommerce to prosper, a solution to managing  
33      eCommerce returns must be provided.

34  
35      SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

1           The present invention provides a computer system (the "System", or the "Return System")  
2   that is configured and programmed to provide online stores with a fast, simple, convenient way for  
3   eCommerce customers of an online store to return merchandise purchased from that store from  
4   within that online store.

5           In an exemplary embodiment described herein, the Return System has three major  
6   components: 1.) A Returns Manager Subsystem that provides a user interface to each Merchant to  
7   setup the Merchant's account, setup the Merchant's return policy and rules, and to monitor the status  
8   and movement of return shipments; 2.) A Consumer Returns Subsystem (also sometimes referred to  
9   herein as a "Customer Returns Subsystem") that provides each consumer using the Returns System  
10   with an online user interface that leads the consumer through the returns process, displays the return  
11   policies and rules to the consumer, provides shipping document to ship the return package if  
12   appropriate, and permits the consumer to track their return shipments; and 3.) a Returns Processing  
13   Subsystem that, in the exemplary embodiment, provides background shipping and tracking  
14   functionality. In one exemplary embodiment of the present invention, the Online Merchant  
15   integrates the Merchant's online system with the Returns Processing Subsystem.

16           In another exemplary embodiment, as described herein below, the Returns Processing  
17   Subsystem is provided as an independent web-based application service (referred to below as a  
18   "Return Merchant Service System") operated by a common provider, sometimes referred to herein  
19   as "iShip.com".

20           The above-described components are sometimes collectively and/or separately referred to  
21   herein as the System, and/or as the Return System. References to the Return System should be  
22   understood by someone with ordinary skill in the art to refer to the appropriate component and/or  
23   components of the system. It should be understood by someone with ordinary skill in the art that  
24   reference herein to Merchant setup, monitoring, tracking and other Merchant functions and  
25   interactions with the Return System are provided through the Returns Manager Subsystem of the  
26   Return System; and that reference to Consumer input, monitoring, tracking, and other Consumer  
27   functions and interactions with the Return System are provided through the Consumer Returns  
28   Subsystem of the Return System.

29           It should be further understood by someone with ordinary skill in the art that use of the  
30   System component terms described above is for illustrative purposes only and is not a limitation of  
31   the invention. Each of the above-described components can be integrated with the other as a single  
32   system without departing from the spirit of the present invention. Further, functions from each of  
33   the above-described Returns Manager and Consumer Returns components can be separately  
34   provided by a processing subsystem, such as the Returns Processing System, with communication  
35   interfaces with each of the other subsystems and with the system databases without departing from



1 the spirit of the present invention. Without departing from the spirit of the invention, it should be  
2 understood by someone with ordinary skill in the art that in an alternative embodiment of the  
3 invention, the main components of the Return System can perform various levels of processing.

4 Each Merchant that wants to offer its customers with in-store access to the Return System 1  
5 first accesses the Returns Manager Subsystem User Interface of the System to set up the Merchant's  
6 Account, and to establish rules governing the Merchant's returns, exchanges and refunds policy.  
7 The Return System 1 then provides a Customer Returns Subsystem and User Interface in the  
8 Merchant's online store to the Merchant's customers with which to facilitate the return shipping of  
9 merchandise.

10 The System provides each online store (sometimes referred to herein as eCommerce  
11 Provider or Merchant) with the capability to specify the store's individualized returns, exchange,  
12 and refund policies. The System enforces a consistent, standardized, and automated returns policy  
13 for each online store.

14 Among the returns policy options available through the System, customers can be issued an  
15 immediate, automated return authorization. Other returns policy options allow each online store to  
16 specify whether or not shipping charges are to be paid by the store or by the customer. The System  
17 further provides customers with the ability to print a return shipping label on a printer attached to  
18 the customer's personal computer directly from the online store.

19 The System provides for the return of items to different locations, including the online  
20 store's main warehouse, to secondary facilities, or to sibling retail locations.

21 The System further provides for the return of items through multiple carriers or through  
22 retail shippers, such as Mail Boxes Etc., thereby offering customers choices and insulating the  
23 online store from carrier labor strikes.

24 In the Merchant's online store, a customer makes a purchase, which is subsequently shipped  
25 to the customer (the "Consumer"). The Consumer if dissatisfied with the ordered item, wants to  
26 return it. To do so, the Consumer returns to the Merchant's online store, accesses the Consumer's  
27 order history for that Merchant, and arranges to return the item or items from the Merchant's online  
28 store.

29 The System collects, according to each online store's specification, consumer reasons for  
30 returning items and stores this information in a centralized database of return information. The  
31 System analyzes and reports the return data, and issues refunds to customers in accordance with the  
32 online store's refund policy.

33 The Return System 1 provides each participating Merchant with tracking capabilities for  
34 returned parcels. The Return System provides notification and tracking reports for inbound returns,

1 allowing the store to prepare its receiving dock, and to respond to the return reason if appropriate  
2 such as by adjusting inventory or shipping practices to avoid continued potential for returns.

3 Because return shipping is arranged from within the online store, the System provides the  
4 returning consumer with the ability to immediately convert a return to an exchange, or into an  
5 additional order.

6 A Return Merchant Service System component of the computer System embodying the  
7 present invention interfaces and interacts with a Merchant's system to provide each subscribing  
8 eCommerce Merchant with various shipment management functions through Application Program  
9 Interfaces ("API") and web-based user Merchant interfaces, including but not limited to: shipment  
10 rating, shipment labeling, shipment tracking, shipment tracking management reports, returns  
11 analysis and returns management reporting. The present invention provides each Merchant's  
12 customers with pricing of shipping rates for various shipping options, processing of returns requests,  
13 printing of shipping, returns, or traveler labels at the customer's own laser printer, and tracking of  
14 each return shipment.

#### 15 16 DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

17 These and other features of the present invention are more fully set forth in the following  
18 description of exemplary embodiments of the invention. The description is presented with reference  
19 to the accompanying drawings in which:

20 FIG. 1 is a graphic representation depicting the interface relationships provided by the  
21 System of the present invention between electronic Commerce providers, Consumers, and Carriers;

22 FIG. 2 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary user computer configuration and  
23 the computer's interface with an eCommerce Provider and the System;

24 FIG. 3a is a graphic representation of an exemplary configuration of the System, and  
25 relationships with Carriers and eCommerce Providers;

26 FIG. 3b is a high level System component diagram depicting an exemplary System  
27 Architecture in an exemplary embodiment of the System in an Internet environment;

28 FIGS. 4a through 4c are high level logic flow diagrams depicting an exemplary Merchant  
29 experience within an exemplary embodiment of the Return System;

30 FIG. 5a is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary main menu and an exemplary  
31 submenu hierarchy in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

32 FIG. 5b is high level interactivity diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of the  
33 interactivity of the Returns Manager Subsystem between a Merchant's Client Machine, Returns  
34 Manager Page, various Returns Manager Subsystem functions, and the Return System servers in an  
35 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

1 FIG. 5c is high level interactivity diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of the  
2 interactivity of the Returns Manager Subsystem between a Merchant's Client Machine and the  
3 Return System servers in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

4 FIG. 5d is high level interactivity diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of the  
5 interactivity for the Returns Policy Builder Page function of the Returns Manager Subsystem  
6 between the Return System database servers and certain databases in an exemplary embodiment of  
7 the invention;

8 FIG. 5e is high level interactivity diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of the  
9 interactivity of the Returns Monitor Page between a Merchant's Client Machine, the View Inbound  
10 Shipments and View Selected Details features of the Returns Manager Subsystem, and the Return  
11 System servers in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

12 FIG. 6 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Log On Screen in an exemplary  
13 embodiment of the Return System;

14 FIG. 7 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Return System home page in an  
15 embodiment of the Return System;

16 FIG. 8 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Company Information Screen in an  
17 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

18 FIG. 9 is a graphic representation of an exemplary User Administration Screen in an  
19 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

20 FIG. 10 is a graphic representation of an exemplary User Administration Screen in an  
21 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

22 FIG. 11 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Standard Policy Screen in an exemplary  
23 embodiment of the invention;

24 FIG. 12 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Return Shipping Options Screen in an  
25 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

26 FIGS. 13a through 13d are graphic representations of an exemplary Return  
27 Questions/Responses Page in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

28 FIG. 13e is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary configuration of a three  
29 dimensional Situation Response Matix in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

30 FIG. 13f is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary configuration of a Question  
31 Table in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

32 FIG. 13g is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary configuration of an Instruction  
33 Table in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

34 FIG. 13h is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary configuration of a Response  
35 Table in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

1           FIGS. 13i-1 and 13i-2 are high level flow diagrams depicting the flow of logic for applying  
2   a merchant's pre-established return policy logic in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
3           FIG. 13j is a high level data and logic relationship diagram depicting an exemplary Situation  
4   Response flow in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
5           FIG. 14 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary configuration of Follow Up  
6   Actions corresponding to a particular Return Response for a particular Answer Choice for a  
7   particular Question in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
8           FIG. 15 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Policy Exceptions Screen in an  
9   exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
10          FIG. 16 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary first screen of the Exception  
11   Categories Page in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
12          FIGS. 17a and 17b are graphic representations of exemplary Store Categories Screens in an  
13   exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
14          FIGS. 18a and 18b are graphic representations of exemplary Web Page Configuration  
15   Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
16          FIG. 19 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Email Responses Screen in an  
17   exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
18          FIGS. 20a through 20c are logic flow diagrams depicting an exemplary high level logic flow  
19   for a Consumer's experience with an exemplary embodiment of the Returns System of the present  
20   invention from within a Merchant's Online store;  
21          FIG. 21 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Order History display for a particular  
22   Customer in a particular Merchant's Online store;  
23          FIG. 22 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Order Summary Screen for a particular  
24   Order Number for a particular Consumer from within a particular Merchant's Online store in an  
25   exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
26          FIG. 23a is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Returns Service Screen in an  
27   exemplary Merchant's Online store in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
28          FIG. 23b is a high level data and logic flow diagram depicting an overview flow of the  
29   Returns System flow in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
30          FIG. 23c is a high level interactivity diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of the  
31   interactivity of the Customer Returns Subsystem between a Consumer's Client Machine, Customer  
32   Returns Page, various Customer Returns Subsystem functions, and the Return System servers in an  
33   exemplary embodiment of the invention;  
34          FIG. 24 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Returns Service Return Reason Screen  
35   in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

1 FIG. 25 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Return Summary Screen in an  
2 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

3 FIG. 26 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Label Create Screen in an  
4 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

5 FIG. 27a is a graphic representation of an exemplary shipping label for a package for an  
6 item to be returned in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

7 FIG. 27b is a flow diagram depicting an exemplary logic flow for printing of bar-coded  
8 shipping labels in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

9 FIG. 27c is a flow diagram depicting an exemplary logic flow for printing of dimensionally  
10 accurate images in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

11 FIG. 28 is a graphic representation of an exemplary shipping label displayed as a Shipping  
12 Label Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

13 FIG. 29 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Return Shipped e-mail to a Merchant in  
14 an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

15 FIG. 30 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Return Shipped e-mail to a Consumer in  
16 an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

17 FIG. 31 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Returns Service Screen in an  
18 exemplary Merchant's Online store in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

19 FIG. 32 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Returns Service Return Reason Screen  
20 in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

21 FIGS. 33-35 are graphic representations depicting exemplary Consumer Shipping  
22 Preferences Specification Screens in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

23 FIG. 36a is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Dynamically Dimensioned  
24 Multi-Carrier, Multi-Service Graphic Array online display in an exemplary embodiment of the  
25 invention;

26 FIGS. 36b through 36e are high level data retrieval and logic flow diagrams depicting the  
27 data and high level logic that the system uses to calculate a shipping rate in an exemplary  
28 embodiment of the invention;

29 FIG. 37 is a graphic representation depicting an alternative exemplary Dynamically  
30 Dimensioned Multi-Carrier, Multi-Service Graphic Array online display in an exemplary  
31 embodiment of the invention;

32 FIG. 38 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Shipping Summary Screen in an  
33 exemplary embodiment of invention;

34 FIGS. 39a through 39c are simplified flow diagrams depicting the initial Timing and Rating  
35 procedure to generate a Graphic Array in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

1           FIG. 40 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Items Ordered Screen in an  
2 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

3           FIG. 41 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Tracking Information Screen in  
4 an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

5           FIG. 42 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Items Ordered Screen in an  
6 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

7           FIG. 43 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Track Your Package screen in an  
8 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

9           FIG. 44 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary completed Track Your Package  
10 screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

11           FIG. 45 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary alternative Tracking Information  
12 Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

13           FIG. 46 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary View Inbound Return Shipments  
14 Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

15           FIG. 47 is a table depicting exemplary menus for each of the tracking criteria in an  
16 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

17           FIG. 48 is a graphic representation of an exemplary View Inbound Return Shipments Detail  
18 Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

19           FIG. 49 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Reporting, Graphs and Data  
20 Export Generation Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

21           FIG. 50 is a logic flow diagram that depicts the high level logic for tracking the status of a  
22 particular package in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

23           FIG. 51 depicts an exemplary XML formatted request for submitting a tracking request to a  
24 Carrier in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

25           FIG. 52 depicts an exemplary successful tracking response, also in XML format, returned by  
26 the Carrier in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

27           FIG. 53 is a graphic representation of an overview of functional components of an  
28 exemplary embodiment of the present invention and certain exemplary interfaces between the  
29 functional components and entities external to the system;

30           FIG. 54 is a high level block diagram that provides an alternative view of the functional  
31 components of the iReturn Merchant Service System in an exemplary embodiment of the  
32 invention;

33           FIG. 55 is a high level block diagram that graphically depicts certain functional  
34 components of the iReturn Inbound Manager in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

1 FIG. 56 is a graphic representation of an exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor display of  
2 a Pending Log that reports packages for a particular Merchant that are Pending in an exemplary  
3 embodiment of the invention;

4 FIG. 57 is a graphic representation of an exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor display of  
5 an Inbound Log that reports packages for a particular Merchant that are Inbound in an  
6 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

7 FIG. 58 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Detail Tracking display for  
8 an exemplary Detail Tracking request in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

9 FIG. 59 is a graphic representation of an exemplary user interface screen that the iReturn  
10 Inbound Manager presents Merchants with which to request reports in an exemplary  
11 embodiment of the invention;

12 FIG. 60 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary "Returns by SKU" Report in  
13 Chart style in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

14 FIG. 61 is a graphic representation depicting an alternative exemplary "Returns by  
15 SKU" Report in Plain Text style in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

16 FIG. 62 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary "Returns by Product  
17 Category" Report in Chart style in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

18 FIG. 63 is a graphic representation depicting an alternative exemplary "Returns by  
19 Product Category" Report in Plain Text style in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

20 FIG. 64 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary "Expected Return Volumes"  
21 Report in Chart style in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

22 FIG. 65 is a graphic representation depicting an alternative exemplary "Expected Return  
23 Volume" Report in Plain Text style in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

24 FIG. 66 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary "Return Reasons" Report in  
25 Chart style in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

26 FIGS. 67a and 67b are graphic representations depicting alternative exemplary "Return  
27 Reasons" reports in Plain Text style in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

28 FIG. 68 is a graphic representation that depicts an exemplary "Packages With No Scan"  
29 report in Plain Text style in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

30 FIG. 69 is a graphic representation that depicts an exemplary "Late Packages" report in  
31 Plain Text style in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

32 FIG. 70 is a high level interactivity diagram depicting exemplary interactivity by a  
33 Customer with a Merchant's system and between the Merchant's system and the iReturn

1 Merchant Service Servers in a situation where the Customer pays shipping charges in an  
2 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

3 FIG. 71 is a high level interactivity diagram depicting exemplary interactivity by a  
4 Customer with a Merchant's system and between the Merchant's system and the iReturn  
5 Merchant Service Servers in a situation where the Merchant pays shipping charges in an  
6 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

7 FIG. 72 is a high level block diagram depicting some of the API functional components  
8 in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

9 FIG. 73 is a high level structural diagram depicting the structural components of an API  
10 Request in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

11 FIG. 74 is a high level structural diagram depicting the structural components of an API  
12 Response in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

13 FIG. 75a is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary United States Parcel Service  
14 Electronic Merchandise Return label in an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

15 FIG. 75b is a graphic representation depicting exemplary instructions describing how to  
16 print and use an exemplary United States Parcel Service Electronic Merchandise Return label in  
17 an exemplary embodiment of the invention;

18 FIG. 76 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Traveler Label in an  
19 exemplary embodiment of the invention;

20 FIG. 77 is a high level interactivity diagram depicting exemplary interactivity between a  
21 Merchant and the iReturn Merchant Service Servers to request Tracking information in an  
22 exemplary embodiment of the invention; and

23 FIG. 78 is a high level interactivity diagram depicting exemplary interactivity between a  
24 Merchant and the iReturn Merchant Service Servers to export data from the iReturn Merchant  
25 Service System into the Merchant's System in an exemplary embodiment of the invention.

26

## 27 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

28 A portion of the disclosure of this patent document, including but not limited to the  
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4       their respective owners.

5       The computer System of the present invention provides a plurality of online eCommerce  
6       Merchants with a single User Interface (“UI”) with which each eCommerce Merchant can  
7       provide the Merchant’s Consumers with an automated return parcel management system for a  
8       plurality of supported Carriers.

9       There are two primary User Interface aspects of the invention., a Returns Manager  
10      Subsystem User Interface for the Merchant’s “Back Office” (sometimes referred to herein as a  
11      “Return Policy Engine”), and a Consumer Returns Subsystem User Interface available to the  
12      Consumer through the Merchant’s online store.

13      The Return Policy Engine component of the computer System embodying the present  
14      invention provides each of a plurality of online eCommerce Merchants with a User Interface  
15      (“UI”) with which each eCommerce Merchant can, among other things: 1.) establish parameters  
16      for, and describe, the Merchant’s return and exchange policy, including exception processing;  
17      2.) authorize return shipping options, selected by the Merchant from a plurality of services  
18      offered by a plurality of carriers, to which the Merchant’s consumers will be given access by  
19      the System; 3.) build a question dialog for consumers with which the System will determine  
20      why each customer is returning merchandise; and 4.) construct automated e-mail response  
21      formats with which to communicate with consumers.

22      The Returns Policy Engine/Returns Manager Subsystem User Interface for the  
23      Merchant’s Back Office is an integrated set of tools with which the Merchant can: 1.) View  
24      inbound returning merchandise shipments in summary or in detail; 2.) Track shipments for  
25      multiple carriers with only one tracking number; 3.) Analyze return patterns and trends; 4.)  
26      Administer the returns process; 5.) Setup account names and access privileges; 6.) Establish the  
27      parameters for automatic enforcement of their store’s return policy; 7.) Build return shipping  
28      options; 8.) Build questions to determine why customer is returning merchandise; 9.) Build  
29      return policy exceptions; 10.) Build automated Email responses; 11.) Build integration links  
30      between the merchant’s site and the Returns Manager Subsystem.

31      A Customer Returns User Interface component of the computer System embodying the  
32      present invention provides each customer of an eCommerce Merchant (for which the Return  
33      Policy Engine has been installed and the necessary parameters established) with a User Interface

1 with the relevant eCommerce Merchant's online store with which the customer interacts to  
2 return or exchange an item of merchandise.

3 Different types of embodiments for the Customer Returns Subsystem and User Interface  
4 features of this invention include, among others: 1.) a Customer Returns Desktop application  
5 with a Returns Back Office application; 2.) Customer Returns Integrated – a web enabled  
6 application and user interface integrated into the Merchant's site; and 3.) Customer Returns API  
7 – Application Programming Interfaces written, e.g., in XML designed to pass data for  
8 integration into the Merchant's site.

9 Each of the different types of embodiments of the invention give the Merchant an  
10 automated returns functionality including such features, among others, as: 1.) a step-by-step  
11 "wizard" (user interface software) that leads each customer through the merchandise return  
12 process; 2.) a return policy established with the Returns Manager Subsystem for the Back Office  
13 application; 3.) automatic enforcement of return policy rules; 4.) supports both merchant and  
14 customer paid return shipping scenarios; 5.) customer (Consumer) tracking of returned  
15 merchandise via multiple carriers; and 6.) automatic feed of shipment data to the Returns  
16 Manager Subsystem for the Back Office application.

17 FIG. 1 is a graphic representation depicting the interface relationships provided by the  
18 System 1 of the present invention between a plurality of electronic Commerce providers  
19 ("Merchants") 2a-2n, Consumers 3a-3n, and Carriers 4a-4n.

20 It should be noted that the use of suffixes such as "a" through "n" in connection with  
21 numbered elements of the FIGURES herein are exemplary and are not a limitation of the  
22 invention. Rather, the suffixes "a" through "n" are used to represent a plurality, but unknown  
23 number, of similar elements.

24 As conceptually depicted in FIG. 1, a Consumer, e.g., 3a that has purchased merchandise  
25 from an online Merchant, e.g., 2a, can visit the online Merchant's store, e.g., 2a, to arrange to  
26 return an item of merchandise. The online Merchant's store 2a provides the Consumer 3a with  
27 access to the Return System 1 through which the Consumer interfaces with supported Carriers  
28 4a through 4n. Carriers supported by the System include Carriers such as Airborne, FedEx,  
29 United Parcel Service, USPS, and Yellow Freight. The System 1 is completely expandable and  
30 scalable to include additional Carriers.

31 As depicted in FIG. 2, each User 7 (which may be either a Merchant or a Consumer) has  
32 access to a computer 8, for instance a personal computer ("PC"). The computer 8 is configured  
33 with a display device 9 that provides a display screen 10. The computer 8 is further configured

1 with one or more user input devices, such as, for example, a keyboard 11 and a mouse 12. The  
2 computer 8 is also configured with a printing device 13, such as a laser printer. If the computer  
3 device 8 serves as a Shipping Station, the computer 8 may be further configured with a  
4 weighing device such as a scale 1024 and a bar code reader 1027.

5 Users access and browse the Internet 15 using a web browser 14 that generally resides  
6 and is executed on the user's PC 8. The web browser 14 allows the Shipper/User 7 to retrieve  
7 and render hyper-media content from one or more of a Merchant's Server computers, e.g., 16.  
8 Commercially available web browsers include, e.g., Netscape's Navigator™ and Microsoft  
9 Internet Explorer™. The Merchant's Server computer 16 is linked to the Return Shipping  
10 System Server 17.

11 FIG. 3a is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary view of the System Data  
12 Center and its interfaces with Consumer computers 8a-8n, Carrier Server computers 23-2  
13 through 27-2, and eCommerce/eAuction Providers/Merchants 28a-28n, via the Internet 15.

14 As depicted in FIG. 3a, the System provides a plurality of server computers 20a-21z  
15 ("servers" or "server computers"). Some of the server computers are configured as Web  
16 servers, e.g., 21m-21r. The Web servers 21m-21r are configured to perform multi-parcel, multi-  
17 carrier, multi-service parcel shipping management functions. The Web servers 21m-21r are  
18 sometimes referred to herein as "shipping servers" or "shipping Web servers".

19 Other servers are configured as Database Servers. In an exemplary embodiment of the  
20 invention, the Database Servers are SQL Servers. Some of the Database Servers are configured  
21 to access Rating Database Data. The Database Servers that are configured to access Rating  
22 Database Data are referred to as the Rating Servers.

23 The Web server computers communicate through the Internet with client computers or  
24 with server computers, e.g., 16, of a calling Merchant's system.

25 In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, the system further provides at least one  
26 server computer that acts as a scheduler or "Load Balancer". The Load Balancer selects one of  
27 the plurality of shipping Web servers 21m-21r based on the load of work performed by that  
28 selected shipping Web server as compared to the other shipping Web servers. The Load  
29 Balancer directs incoming data to the selected shipping Web server for processing.

30 An overview of an exemplary System architecture is depicted in FIG. 3b. The overview  
31 depicted is exemplary and meant to be illustrative; it is not a limitation of the invention. As  
32 depicted in FIG. 3b, one embodiment of the invention uses a three-tiered architecture.

1       The Data Management Tier 1201 is comprised of a Database Storage component 1202  
2       that in the embodiment depicted uses an SQL Server; a Message Queue Storage component  
3       1203 that in the embodiment depicted uses MS Message Queue; and a File Storage component  
4       1204 that in the embodiment depicted uses NTFS, and DFS. Each of the Database Storage  
5       component 1202, the Message Queue Storage component 1203, and the File Storage component  
6       1204, communicate with the Component Tier 1208 of the System architecture, communications  
7       by each component with the Component Tier 1208 represented by elements 1205, 1206 and  
8       1207 respectively. According to the embodiment depicted in FIG. 3b, the Server Components  
9       of the Component Tier 1208 use C++ programming language and COM Objects.

10       The Application Tier 1212 of the System Architecture is comprised of a Web Shipper  
11       Client component 1213 (which uses HTML, ASP and JavaScript), the NOC Administration  
12       component 1214 (which uses HTML, ASP, VB, and C++), and the Web Shipping Station  
13       component 1215 (which uses HTML, ASP, JavaScript, C++, and ActiveX Controls). Each of  
14       the Web Shipper Client component 1213, the NOC Administration component 1214, and the  
15       Web Shipping Station component 1215 communicate with the Server Components of the  
16       Component Tier 1208 as represented by the communication elements 1209, 1210 and 1211  
17       respectively.

18       In one embodiment, the System is implemented in an NT environment. The description  
19       of the System as being implemented in an NT environment is exemplary and is not a limitation  
20       of the invention.

21       Returning to FIG. 3a, the System Database Servers 20a-20n maintain System  
22       Database(s) 22. The System Database(s) 22 contain many types of information. For example,  
23       when a Consumer returns a package using the System 1, one or more of the System's Database  
24       Servers, e.g., 20a-20n, create a new System tracking number. When a new System tracking  
25       number is created, one of the System's Database Servers, e.g., 20a-20n, adds a new package  
26       record with the newly created System tracking number to a Package Table 28 that resides in the  
27       System database 22 and contains package records for System processed packages.

28       An exemplary embodiment of the Package Table 28 contains the following information  
29       for each package: 1) Package Tracking State ID; 2) Package Shipping State ID; 3) Actual  
30       Delivery Time; 4) Delivered To information; 5) Shipping Date; 6) Carrier Tracking Number; 7)  
31       System Tracking Number; 8) Carrier ID; 9) Actual Package Weight; 10) Service Description;  
32       and 11) Package OID. The content of these fields are described further below.

1       The System's Database Servers 20a-20n maintain a Product Table 30. An exemplary  
2       embodiment of a Product Table 30 contains the following information for each Product: 1)  
3       Product Code – such as the product SKU; 2) Product Category – often a merchant specified  
4       grouping mechanism; 3) Merchant's Return Merchandise Authorization ("RMA") Number (In  
5       the exemplary embodiment, each product has a corresponding RMA); 3) Product Description;  
6       5) Product Manufacturer; 6) Product Quantity; 7) Product Price; and 8) Product Tax.

7       The System's Database Servers 20a-20n also maintain a Package History Table 28,  
8       described in more detail below.

9       In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, tracking is performed whenever possible  
10      using carrier-specific Tracking API's (Application Program Interface). For a Tracking API, a  
11      Carrier predefines a layout for tracking requests and predefines a layout for tracking request  
12      responses. The System 1 then provides tracking request data according to the layout predefined  
13      by the particular carrier. When the System 1 receives tracking request response data from the  
14      particular Carrier, the System 1 parses the response data according to the tracking request  
15      response layout predefined by the particular Carrier. In order to communicate with each  
16      Carrier's system, the System 1 uses the particular Carrier's Internet URL for the particular  
17      Carrier's web server system with which to make an HTTP connection to the Carrier's web  
18      server, e.g., 23-2, Depending upon the Carrier, the System's 1 tracking request and response  
19      interface with the Carrier's web server may be formatted and programmed using HyperText  
20      Markup Language ("HTML"), Extensible Markup Language ("XML"), both HTML and XML,  
21      or any requirement specified by a Carrier.

22      In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, in cases in which a particular Carrier  
23      does not support an API, the System performs tracking using an alternative approach sometimes  
24      referred to as "web scraping". In order to track using the web scraping approach, the System 1  
25      communicates with a Carrier by formatting HTML queries to the Carrier's Internet Website.  
26      The System 1 is programmed to receive and parse HTML responses from that Carrier's  
27      Website. The web scraping process simulates the presence and interactivity of a user at the  
28      particular Carrier's Website.

29      In one embodiment, the Returns Manager Subsystem for the Back Office product  
30      requires Microsoft's Internet Explorer version 5.01 or higher; the Customer Returns software  
31      requires either Netscape version 4.0 or Internet Explorer version 4.0 or higher.

32

1           A.     RETURNS MANAGER SUBSYSTEM AND USER INTERFACE -  
2           MERCHANT ADMINISTRATION

3           FIGS. 4a through 4c are high level logic flow diagrams depicting an exemplary  
4   Merchant experience within an exemplary embodiment of the Returns Manager Subsystem  
5   provided by the Return System. An exemplary embodiment of the Returns Manager Subsystem  
6   User Interface provided by the Return System provides a high level menu from which each  
7   Merchant can access the Return System.

8           FIG. 5a is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary main menu and an exemplary  
9   submenu hierarchy in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. It will be understood by one  
10   with ordinary skill in the art that menus such as the one depicted in FIG. 5a provide the  
11   Merchant/User with direct, as opposed to serial, access to the available functions. It will be  
12   further understood by one with ordinary skill in the art, therefore, that the high level logic flow  
13   depicted in FIGS. 4a through 4c is illustrative, is not a limitation of the invention, and does not  
14   impose serial access to the Merchant functions described.

15          FIG. 5b is high level interactivity diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of the  
16   interactivity of the Returns Manager Subsystem between a Merchant's Client Machine, Returns  
17   Manager Page, various Returns Manager Subsystem functions, and the Return System servers in  
18   an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As depicted in FIG. 5b, a portion of the Returns  
19   Manager 751 operates on the Merchant's client machine 750. The Merchant accesses the  
20   Returns Manager Page 752 through the Merchant's client machine 750 to select one of the  
21   Returns Manager Subsystem functions from the Returns Process option 99 (FIG. 52) from the  
22   main menu.

23          As depicted in FIG. 5b, if the Merchant enters a password 766 through the Returns  
24   Manager Page 752 uses the System's Web Servers 21m-21r, which in turn use the System's  
25   Database Servers 20a-20n to validate the password 767.

26          From the Returns Manager Page 752, the Merchant can select the Returns Monitor  
27   Option 114 (FIG. 5a) or the Return Policy Builder Option 107 (FIG. 5a). If the Merchant  
28   selects the Returns Policy Builder Option 107 (FIG. 5a), the System uses the Returns Policy  
29   Builder Page 769 to use the System's Web Servers 21m-21r and the System's Database Servers  
30   20a-20n to provide the Merchant with the Returns Monitor functionality as will be described  
31   below with regard to FIGS. 5c and 5d. If the Merchant selects the Returns Monitor Option 114  
32   (FIG. 5a), the System uses the Returns Monitor Page 768 to use the System's Web Servers

21m-21r and the System's Database Servers 20a-20n to provide the Merchant with the Returns Monitor functionality as will be described below with regard to FIG. 5e.

As depicted in FIG. 5b, from the Returns Manager Page 752, the Merchant can select the Return Policy Builder Option 107. FIG. 5c is high level interactivity diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of the interactivity of the Returns Manager Subsystem between a Merchant's Client Machine and the Return System servers in an exemplary embodiment of the invention once the Merchant has selected the Return Policy Builder Option 107.

If the Merchant selects the Standard Policy Builder option 108, the Returns Manager Page accesses the Standard Policy Builder function 753 using the System's Web Servers 21m-21r, which in turn use the System's Database Servers 20a-20n to access the Standard Policy Data 754.

If the Merchant selects the Return Shipping Options Builder option 109, the Returns Manager Page accesses the Return Shipping Options Builder function 755 using the System's Web Servers 21m-21r, which in turn use the System's Database Servers 20a-20n to access the Return Shipping Options Data 756.

If the Merchant selects the Return Questions Builder option 110, the Returns Manager Page accesses the Return Questions Builder function 757 using the System's Web Servers 21m-21r, which in turn use the System's Database Servers 20a-20n to access the Return Questions Data 758.

If the Merchant selects the Policy Exceptions Builder option 111, the Returns Manager Page accesses the Policy Exceptions Builder function 759 using the System's Web Servers 21m-21r, which in turn use the System's Database Servers 20a-20n to access the Policy Exceptions Data 760.

If the Merchant selects the Web Page Configuration Builder option 112, the Returns Manager Page accesses the Web Page Configuration Builder function 761 using the System's Web Servers 21m-21r, which in turn use the System's Database Servers 20a-20n to access the Web Page Configuration Data 762.

If the Merchant selects the E-Mail Response Builder option 113, the Returns Manager Page accesses the E-Mail Response Builder function 763 using the System's Web Servers 21m-21r, which in turn use the System's Database Servers 20a-20n to access the E-Mail Response Data 764.

FIG. 5d is high level interactivity diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of the interactivity for the Returns Policy Builder Page function of the Returns Manager Subsystem

1 between the Return System database servers 20a-20n and Return Policy databases 754, 756,  
2 758, 760, 762, and 764 in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. FIG. 5d further depicts  
3 the type of data stored in each database. For example, as depicted in FIG. 5d, the Merchant's  
4 Policy Overview Statement, the Merchant's Return Period, Refund Method, and Refund  
5 Amount policies 775 are stored in the Standard Policy Data database 754. Return Locations,  
6 Primary Return Center, and Online Shipping Options 776 are stored in the Return Shipping  
7 Options Data database 756. Return Questions and Responses 777 are stored in the Returns  
8 Question Data database 758. Exception definitions 778 are stored in the Policy Exception Data  
9 database 760. Return Page Links 779 are stored in the Web Page Configuration Data database  
10 763. Situation definitions and corresponding e-mail responses 780 are saved in the E-Mail  
11 Response Data database 764.

12 From the Returns Manager Page 752, the Merchant can select the Returns Monitor  
13 Option 114. FIG. 5e is high level interactivity diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of  
14 the interactivity of the Returns Monitor Page between a Merchant's Client Machine, the View  
15 Inbound Shipments and View Selected Details features of the Returns Manager Subsystem, and  
16 the Return System servers in an exemplary embodiment of the invention once the Merchant has  
17 selected the Return s Monitor Option 114.

18 As depicted in FIG. 5e, if the Merchant selects the View Inbound Shipments option 116  
19 as depicted in FIG. 7, the Returns Monitor Page accesses the View Inbound Shipments function  
20 770 using the System's Web Servers 21m-21r, which in turn use the System's Database Servers  
21 20a-20n to access the Inbound Shipments Data 771.

22 As depicted in FIG. 5e, if the Merchant selects the Details option, e.g., 640 as depicted  
23 in FIG. 46, the Returns Monitor Page accesses the View Details function 772 using the  
24 System's Web Servers 21m-21r, which in turn use the System's Database Servers 20a-20n to  
25 access the Shipment Details Data 773.

26 Continuing with the description of the Merchant's experience in the Returns System, as  
27 depicted in FIG. 4a, the Merchant logs on 100 to the Return System. As previously mentioned,  
28 it should be understood by someone with ordinary skill in the art that reference herein to  
29 Merchant setup, monitoring, tracking and other Merchant functions and interactions with the  
30 Return System are provided through the Returns Manager Subsystem and User Interface.

31 FIG. 6 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Log On Screen in an  
32 exemplary embodiment of the Return System. The Merchant/User is asked to provide an e-  
33 mail/User ID 120 and Password 121 and to click on the onscreen Continue button 122. If the



1 Merchant/User enters an e-mail/User ID 120 and a Password 121, the Return System validates  
2 the security information against security information contained in the System databases 22. If  
3 the Merchant-supplied security information is valid, the Return System displays the Return  
4 System home page and main menu; otherwise, the Return System notifies the Merchant/User  
5 that the security information supplied is incorrect.

6 The Merchant/User is instructed how to locate a forgotten password 123-1 or to  
7 otherwise recover a forgotten password by pressing the onscreen Recovery button 123-2. If the  
8 Merchant/User presses the onscreen Recovery button 123-2, the Return System searches the  
9 Return System's databases 22 for the Merchant-supplied e-mail/User ID; if found, the Return  
10 System pulls the password associated with the e-mail/User ID and e-mails the designated e-mail  
11 address with the password and notifies the Merchant/User to check its e-mail for the password.  
12 If the Return System does not locate the Merchant-supplied e-mail/User ID, then it notifies the  
13 Merchant accordingly.

14 If the Merchant/User is altogether new to the Return System, the Merchant/User is  
15 instructed to apply 124-1 by clicking on the onscreen Apply button 124-2. In the Application  
16 procedure, the Merchant/User is required to identify the Merchant's company name, web site  
17 URL, credit information, payment information, such as credit card number and expiration date,  
18 "online store" return locations, physical retail store return locations. Once the application  
19 information is verified, a password is assigned to the Merchant and the Return System  
20 composes and sends an e-mail to the Merchant containing notification of the assigned password.  
21 Once the Merchant/User has a valid password, the Merchant/User can Log On to the Return  
22 System to set up the Merchant's Account.

23 Returning to FIG. 4a, once the Merchant has logged on, the Return System displays a  
24 home page with a main menu. FIG. 7 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Return  
25 System home page in an embodiment of the Return System. The main menu provides a menu  
26 selection for returning the Merchant to the Merchant's own web site 130. The Return System  
27 supplies the Merchant web site menu selection with the web site URL provided by the Merchant  
28 User during the Application procedure described above.

29 The main menu provides a menu selection for the Returns Manager 131. The submenu  
30 selections for the Returns Manager are depicted in the body 135 of the home page depicted in  
31 FIG. 7. The submenu selections for the Returns Manager are the default display for the Return  
32 System home page; they are also displayed when the Returns Manager menu item 131 has been  
33 selected.

1           The main menu further provides menu selections to Log Out 132, to request Help text  
2   133, and to link to a main shipping system web site 134.

3           Returning to FIG. 4a, once a Merchant/User has successfully logged in to the Return  
4   System, the home page 101 is displayed as depicted in FIG. 7. A newly accepted  
5   Merchant/User must complete Account Setup 102 by supplying such information as Company  
6   Information 103, User Administration information 104, and Return Center information 105.  
7   Account Setup information is saved in the Systems Databases 22 such as in an Account  
8   Database 106 (FIGS. 4a-4c).

9           Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant/User selects the Company Information selection  
10   item 103, the Return System displays a Company Information Screen. FIG. 8 is a graphic  
11   representation of an exemplary Company Information Screen in an exemplary embodiment of  
12   the invention. In the Company Information Screen, the Merchant/User is prompted to supply  
13   the Company Name 140, Logo URL 141, color preference 142, and Customer Service contact  
14   information 143.

15          Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant/User selects the User Administration selection item  
16   104, the Return System displays a User Administration Screen. FIG. 9 is a graphic  
17   representation of an exemplary User Administration Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the  
18   invention. In the User Administration Screen, the Merchant/User is prompted to identify User  
19   Names and associate those names with User ID's 145. The Merchant/User is also prompted to  
20   define User Names for those who should be allowed each access privilege level 150. For  
21   example, the Merchant/User is prompted to define one or more User Names authorized to  
22   perform Return Monitor privileges 146; one or more User Names authorized to perform Return  
23   Policy Builder privileges 147; and one or more User Names authorized to perform Account  
24   Setup privileges 148. The Merchant/User is also prompted to identify eMail contacts and  
25   telephone numbers for User Names 149.

26          Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant/User selects the Return Centers selection item 105,  
27   the Return System displays a Return Centers Screen. FIG. 10 is a graphic representation of an  
28   exemplary User Administration Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. The  
29   Return System prompts the Merchant User to enter information concerning one or more Return  
30   Centers. Return Center information includes, for example, the Center Name 151, an Attention  
31   name 152, one or more Address lines 153, city state and zip code 154, country 155, and  
32   telephone number 156.

1 As depicted in FIG. 4b, once the Merchant/User has provided Account Setup  
2 information, the Merchant/User can define to the Return System the Merchant's Return Policy  
3 107. In the Return Policy Builder 107, the Merchant/User provides Standard Policy information  
4 108, Return Shipping Options 109, Return Questions 110, Policy Exceptions 111, Web Page  
5 Configuration information 112 and eMail Responses 113. Return Policy information is saved in  
6 the System Databases 22 such as in the Account Database 106.

7 Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant/User selects the Standard Policy menu item 108,  
8 the Return System displays a Standard Policy Screen. FIG. 11 is a graphic representation of an  
9 exemplary Standard Policy Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. The Return  
10 System provides the Merchant/User with a Policy Overview Statement window 160 in which to  
11 describe the Merchant's overall return policy. The Return System will display the text from the  
12 Merchant's Policy Overview Statement at the beginning of each customer's returns processing.  
13 The Policy Overview Statement window 160 can accept text, e.g., 160-3 only, or can process  
14 HTML commands imbedded within the text, e.g., 160-1 and 160-2, to format the text for  
15 eventual presentation to the Merchant's online customers. The Merchant/User can navigate  
16 through the Policy Overview Statement window 160 using up 161-1 and down 161-2 scroll  
17 buttons. The Merchant/User can preview the formatted text of the Policy Overview Statement  
18 by pressing an onscreen Preview button 162.

19 The Merchant/User defines the window of time in which the Merchant will accept a  
20 return ("Return Window") 167 by entering a time frame 163 and a reference event 165. The  
21 Return System provides a scroll down menu of time frames which the Merchant/User accesses by  
22 pressing the time frame scroll down menu button 164. The Return System also provides a scroll  
23 down menu of acceptable reference events which the Merchant/User accesses by pressing the  
24 reference event scroll down menu button 166. The Merchant/User selects a time frame and/or a  
25 reference event by placing the cursor on the desired choice and clicking. With respect to a time  
26 frame, if none of the time frames listed in the time frame scroll down menu match the Merchant's  
27 refund window policy, then the Merchant/User can enter the appropriate number in days. The  
28 Return Window 167 selections described above are exemplary and are not a limitation of the  
29 invention. In an alternative embodiment, the Return System provides for the definition of a Return  
30 Window scale from which a partial refund can be calculated. For example, an item returned within  
31 30 days results in a full refund; an item returned after 30 days but prior to the expiration of 60 days  
32 results in a 75% refund; an item returned after 60 days but prior to the expiration of 90 days results  
33 in store credit only.

1           The Merchant/User defines the Merchant's Refund Method 168 by selecting one of the  
2 Refund Method choices: Refund 169; Store Credit Only 170; or Choice of Refund or Store Credit  
3 171. The Refund Method choices described above are illustrative and not a limitation of the  
4 invention. Some alternative embodiments of the Return System provide additional choices,  
5 including a partial refund choice the calculation for which (Refund Amount 172) can be defined by  
6 the Merchant to be dependent upon factors such as the actual return time frame as compared to a  
7 Return Window scale.

8           The Merchant/User defines the Merchant's Refund Amount calculation method 172 by  
9 identifying the components of the original charges that will be included in the refund: Price of Item  
10 173; Tax on Item 174; and/or Original Shipping Charge 175. The Refund Amount calculation  
11 method 172 described above is illustrative and not a limitation of the invention. In an alternative  
12 embodiment, the Return System provides additional components that can be defined by the  
13 Merchant/User to modify the amount refunded. For example, a percentage can be chosen and  
14 entered with which to reduce refunds made for returns made after 30 days. Further, the above  
15 described Refund Policy components pertain to the Merchant's standard general policy. In an  
16 alternative embodiment, the Merchant/User can additionally define Return, Refund and Exchange  
17 policies at lower levels, such as at a product category definition level. Additionally, in an  
18 alternative embodiment of the invention, the Return System provides the ability to recognize "Sale"  
19 items and override standard general and/or product category level policies with a "Sales" policy  
20 (such as one that requires no refund for final sale items).

21           Once the Merchant/User defines the Merchant's Return Policy, the Merchant/User can save  
22 the Policy definition by clicking the onscreen Save button 177. The Merchant/User can cancel the  
23 definition by clicking the onscreen Cancel button 176.

24           Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant/User selects the Return Shipping Options menu item  
25 109, the Return System displays a Return Shipping Options Screen. FIG. 12 is a graphic  
26 representation of an exemplary Return Shipping Options Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the  
27 invention.

28           Using the Return Shipping Options Screen, the Merchant/User defines the Return Locations  
29 180 to which items can be returned. The Merchant can allow returns to the online store by checking  
30 the Online Only item 181 and by selecting a primary return center 182 from a scroll down menu of  
31 return centers accessible by clicking a scroll down menu button 183. The Return System builds the  
32 menu of return centers from information supplied by the Merchant/User as part of the earlier  
33 described application process.

34           The Merchant can allow returns to its physical retail store locations by checking the Any  
35 Retail Store item 184. In an alternative embodiment, the Return System provides the

1 Merchant/User with a choice of Some Retail Locations accompanied by a pull down menu from  
2 which the Merchant/User can select the retail locations at which returns for online-purchase  
3 merchandise will be accepted.

4 In one embodiment of the invention, the Merchant defines return policies for merchandise  
5 purchased at physical retail store locations, as well as or instead of merchandise purchased through  
6 the Merchant's online store, so that all of the Merchant's customers can enjoy the convenience of  
7 returning unwanted merchandise with the ease of online services.

8 Using the Return Shipping Options Screen as depicted in FIG. 12, the Merchant/User  
9 defines Online Shipping Options 185. If the Merchant agrees to pay for shipping returns, the  
10 Merchant/User checks the Merchant Pays option 186 and selects the shipping carriers and service  
11 options 187-1 through 190 for which the Merchant will agree to pay. If the Merchant does not want  
12 to pay for shipping returns, then the Merchant checks the Customer Pays option 191 and selects the  
13 carriers, e.g., 192-195, with which the Consumer may chose to ship the return. If the Merchant  
14 checks both the Merchant Pays option 186 and the Customer Pays option 191, then the Return  
15 System applies the Merchant Pays option 186 to "justified" returns, and the Customer Pays option  
16 191 to "unjustified" returns.

17 The Merchant/User saves its Return Shipping Options by clicking the onscreen Save button  
18 177 or cancels its Return Shipping Option selections by clicking the onscreen Cancel button 176.

19 Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant/User selects the Return Questions menu item 110, the  
20 Return System displays a Return Questions/Responses Page. FIGS. 13a through 13d are graphic  
21 representations of an exemplary Return Questions/Responses Page in an exemplary embodiment of  
22 the invention.

23 The Return Questions Builder is where the Merchant defines questions to determine why the  
24 customer is returning the merchandise. The Return Questions Builder sets up a response tree. For  
25 each answer to each question, a different action can be indicated. The Customer Returns application  
26 wizard will present the questions in serial fashion to the customer and automatically enforce the  
27 programming rules set by the response tree.

28 Each question is enabled or disabled (can only be in one or the other state) by clicking the  
29 check box. The question's text is entered into the question text box. The Merchant has the option of  
30 asking each question for every item returned or just once per return session.

31 For each question, there is a corresponding answer. The answer heading text is entered into  
32 the answer heading text box. The merchant then sets up a response tree in the form of:

33 Answer → Response → Next Action(s). The Merchant has the option of displaying response text.

34 The System further provides actions control of the flow of the Customer Returns  
35 application. There is a button to allow editing of the next action list. Each entry in the "next action"

list is selected via a list box of possible next actions, including for example: 1.) Ask Question number “n”, where n is one of the Merchant’s Return questions; 2.) Issue Refund; 3.) Do not issue Refund; 4.) Pay Return Shipping; 5.) Do not Pay Return Shipping; 6.) Pay Replacement Shipping; and 7.) Do not Pay Replacement Shipping. Further, there is also a button for editing and deletion of the answer. These features are described in more detail below.

Using the Return Questions/Responses Page, the Merchant/User defines return policy questions, circumstances in which the questions should be asked, possible answer choices, and corresponding responses. The Merchant/User defines a plurality of Questions, e.g., Question 1 200 (FIG. 13a), Question 2 230 (FIG. 13b), Question 3 231 (FIG. 13c), Question 4 232 (FIG. 13c), Question 5 233 (FIG. 13d). For each question, the Merchant/User defines a number of criteria, as illustrated as follows for Question 1 200.

As depicted in FIG. 13a, the Merchant/User defines the first Question 200 as On 201 or Off 202. The Merchant/User enters the text of the first Question 203 and instructs the Return System to either ask the first Question for each item to be returned 204 or Once per return 205. The Merchant/User enters an Answer Heading 206 with which to instruct the consumer making a return. The Merchant/User enters one or more Answer Choices, e.g., 207, 212, 216, 220. For each Answer Choice, e.g., 207, the Merchant/User enters Response text 208 (through which the Merchant/User can navigate using up and down scroll buttons, e.g., 209-1 and 209-2); indicates whether the Response text should be displayed 210 (checked: display; blank: do not display); identify Follow Up Instructions, e.g., 211-1, 211-2, 211-3 (FIG. 13a). Follow Up Instructions are pre-established key word instructions which are described below with respect to FIG. 14. The Merchant/User clicks on the Edit Follow Up link e.g., 211-4 (FIG. 13a) to display a Follow Up Actions Screen, described below with respect to FIG. 14, through which the Merchant/User defines the Follow Up Actions appropriate for the particular Return Response for the particular Answer Choice for the particular Question. The Follow Up Instructions, e.g., 211-1, 211-2, and 211-3, depicted in FIG. 13a are pulled from the Merchant/User’s input of Follow Up Actions to the Follow Up Action Screen described below with respect to FIG. 14.

As depicted in FIG. 13b, the Merchant/User can click the onscreen Add/Remove Answer Choices button 224 to add or remove particular Answer Choices. The Merchant/User can check the Add Customer Comments Field 225 to display a window in which the Customer can enter text comments.

As depicted in FIG. 13d, the Merchant/User saves the Return Questions and Responses by clicking the onscreen Save button 177 and cancels the Return Questions and Responses settings by clicking the onscreen Cancel button 176.

1           The Merchant/User defines Follow Up Actions for each Return Response by clicking the  
2   Edit Follow Up link, e.g., 211-4 (FIG. 13a), that corresponds to a particular Return Response, e.g.,  
3   208. FIG. 14 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary configuration of Follow Up  
4   Actions corresponding to a particular Return Response for a particular Answer Choice for a  
5   particular Question in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As depicted in FIG. 14, for a  
6   particular Return Response for a particular Answer Choice for a particular Question, The  
7   Merchant/User chooses: whether to Issue a Refund 240 by clicking Yes 241, No 242, or  
8   Undetermined 243; whether to Pay for Return Shipping 244 by clicking Yes 245, No 246, or  
9   Undetermined 247; whether to Pay for Replacement Shipping 248 by clicking Yes 249, No 250 or  
10   Undetermined 251; whether to Notify the Merchant's Customer Service Rep 252 by clicking Yes  
11   253, No 254 or Other 255; and whether to Ask Additional Questions 257 and if so, which ones, e.g.,  
12   Q1 258 through Q10 267. In the embodiment depicted, questions with a Question number that  
13   numerically precedes or is equal to the Question Number of the Question from which the Follow Up  
14   Action Screen is entered can not be selected as next questions.

15           The Merchant/User Adds Follow Up Actions by clicking the onscreen Add Follow Up  
16   Actions button 268. The Merchant/User saves the Follow Up Actions entered by clicking the  
17   onscreen Save button 177 or cancels the Follow Up Actions entered by clicking the onscreen Cancel  
18   button 176.

19           Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant/User selects the Policy Exceptions menu item 111, the  
20   Return System displays a Policy Exceptions Screen. FIG. 15 is a graphic representation of an  
21   exemplary Policy Exceptions Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. The Policy  
22   Exceptions Screen displays explanatory text 270 for the Merchant/User describing the uses of the  
23   Policy Exceptions function. The Merchant/User can choose to establish Policy Exception  
24   Categories 271, Items 272 or Customers 273.

25           If the Merchant/User clicks on the Policy Exception Categories link 271, the Return System  
26   displays an Exception Categories Page. FIG. 16 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary  
27   first screen of the Exception Categories Page in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As  
28   depicted in FIG. 16, the Return System displays explanatory text 280 describing how the  
29   Merchant/User can define special return processing for certain groups of items. The Merchant/User  
30   can enter a plurality of product categories 281-300. To cancel the Exception Category entries, the  
31   Merchant/User clicks the onscreen Cancel button 176. To proceed with Exception Category  
32   definitions, the Merchant/User clicks the onscreen Next Step >> button 301.

33           If the Merchant/User clicks the onscreen "Next Step >>" button 301, the Return System  
34   displays Store Categories Screens such as depicted in FIGS. 17a and 17b. As depicted in FIG. 17a,  
35   each Store Category defined in the Exception Categories 281-300 described above is presented so

1 that the Merchant/User can identify the Subcategories, e.g., 302-309. If appropriate, the  
2 Merchant/User can further subcategorize the products by clicking on the Second-Level  
3 Subcategories link, e.g., 310, for the particular Category, e.g., 281. The Merchant/User can then use  
4 these Exception Categories and/or Subcategories to further tailor the Return Questions and  
5 Responses.

6 To save the Categories and/or Subcategories, the Merchant/User clicks the onscreen Save  
7 button 177 (FIG. 17b). To cancel the Categories and/or Subcategories, the Merchant/User clicks the  
8 onscreen Cancel button 176 (FIG. 17b).

9 In a similar way, the Merchant/User can define Exception Policies with respect to particular  
10 Items and/or Customers. If the Merchant/User clicks the Exception Items option 272 (FIG. 15), an  
11 Exception Item Screen is displayed that prompts the Merchant/User for a plurality of Item Names,  
12 IDs or Descriptions, for example, an SKU. If the Merchant/User clicks the Customer Exceptions  
13 option 273 (FIG. 15), a Customer Exception Screen is displayed that prompts the Merchant/User for  
14 a plurality of Exception Customer IDs.

15 Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant/User selects the Web Page Configuration menu item  
16 112, the Return System displays a Web Page Configuration Screen. FIGS. 18a and 18b are graphic  
17 representations of exemplary Web Page Configuration Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the  
18 invention. With the Web Page Configuration Screens, the Merchant/User can define the URL 320,  
19 Cancel URL 321, Done URL 322, Title Font Face 323, Font Face 324, Page Background Color 325,  
20 Shade Color 326, Title Bar Color 327, Title Font Color 328, Hover Text 329, Image Name 330,  
21 Image Text 331, Site Text 332, User ID 333, Password 334, Header HTML text 335 (with  
22 navigation up and down scroll buttons 336-1 and 336-2), Footer HTML text 337 (with navigation up  
23 and down scroll buttons 338-1 (FIG. 18a) and 338-2 (FIG. 18b)) and Integration Notes 339 (with  
24 navigation up and down scroll buttons 340-1 and 340-2). The Merchant/User cancels the Web Page  
25 Configuration settings by clicking the onscreen Cancel button 176 or saves the Web Page  
26 Configuration settings by clicking the onscreen Save button 177.

27 In one embodiment of the invention, the Merchant/User is also prompted to supply a  
28 "mapping" of the Merchant's Online system tag names to data names for data required by the  
29 Returns System. The Merchant supplies the data tag names for particular data in the Merchant's  
30 Order Management System. For each data item required by the Return System to process a return  
31 request, the Return System presents the name and description of the required data and prompts the  
32 Merchant/User to supply a corresponding data tag name. In one such embodiment, the Return  
33 System will access the Merchant's Online store system according to information supplied by the  
34 Merchant in the Web Page Configuration Screen to validate the mapping information and will notify  
35 the Merchant/User if the mapping information supplied is not correct.



1 In the exemplary embodiment of the invention depicted in FIGS. 18a through 18b, the  
2 Merchant's mapping information is supplied off-line as part of the application process and is hard-  
3 coded into the system before assigning the Merchant/User a password for the Return System.

4 Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant/User selects the Email Responses menu item 113, the  
5 Return System displays Email Responses Screen. FIG. 19 is a graphic representation of an  
6 exemplary Email Responses Screen in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. If the  
7 Merchant/User wants to have the opportunity to edit the text of e-mails sent to Customers, the  
8 Merchant/User clicks the Customer option 350. If the Merchant/User wants to have the opportunity  
9 to edit the text or other fields of e-mails sent to Merchant, the Merchant/User clicks the Merchant  
10 option 351.

11 A component for the Returns Policy Builder function is the situation response table which  
12 acts like a traffic cop to direct the logic flow in the Customer Return application. The table consists  
13 of the following elements:

14 A.) Situation Table – contains a list of all possible circumstances that might need a  
15 response. For example: 1.) Merchant pays for return shipping; 2.) Customer pays for return  
16 shipping; 3.) Customer X makes a return request; 4.) Product Z is selected for a return; 5.)  
17 Product category y is selected for a return; and 6.) Wrong item received.

18  
19 B.) Response Table – contains a list of all possible actions the system can take. For  
20 example: 1.) Issue Refund; 2.) Reply with Email format N; 3.) Pay Return Shipping; 4.) Ask  
21 question N; and 5.) Reply with response Z.

22  
23 C.) Situation-Response Table – contains a list all of the valid situation-response  
24 pairings.

25  
26 In one embodiment of the invention, the situation response table is a three-dimensional  
27 matrix an exemplary embodiment of which is depicting in FIG. 13e. FIG. 13e is a graphic  
28 representation depicting an exemplary configuration of a three dimensional Situation Response  
29 Matix in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. FIG. 13f is a graphic representation depicting  
30 an exemplary configuration of a Question Table in an exemplary embodiment of the invention.  
31 FIG. 13g is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary configuration of an Instruction Table in  
32 an exemplary embodiment of the invention. FIG. 13h is a graphic representation depicting an  
33 exemplary configuration of a Response Table in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. The  
34 configuration of questions, responses and instructions depicted in FIGS. 13e-13h are illustrative and  
35 are not a limitation of the invention.

1 As depicted in the exemplary embodiment in FIG. 13e, the three-dimensional Situation  
2 Response Matrix comprises:

3 1.) a first dimension defining a set of return questions, e.g., 234-1-a, 234-2-a, . . .  
4 234-xx-a;

5 2.) a second dimension defining, for each return question, a set of return  
6 question responses corresponding to the return question, e.g., responses 235-1-a and 235-2-a  
7 corresponding to question 234-1-a; return question responses 235-3-a, 235-4-a, and 235-5-a  
8 corresponding to question 234-2-a; and responses 235-6-a and 235-7-a corresponding to  
9 question 234-xx-a; and

10 3.) a third dimension defining, for each return question response for each return  
11 question, a set of instructions to the computer system corresponding to the return question  
12 response corresponding to the return question, for example, instructions 236-1-a and 236-2-a  
13 corresponding to response 235-1-a for question 234-1-a.

14 The System populates the Situation Response Matrix using the merchant's input to the  
15 Policy Builder function screens, e.g., as depicted in FIGS. 13a-13d.

16 In the exemplary embodiment depicted in FIGS. 13e-13h, each Question, e.g., 234-1-a,  
17 corresponds to an entry in a Question Table as depicted in FIG. 13f. The Question entry 234-1-a  
18 has a corresponding text entry, e.g., 234-1-b, which the System uses to display the referenced  
19 question, e.g., 234-1-a, to the consumer.

20 In the exemplary embodiment depicted in FIGS. 13e-13h, each Response, e.g., 235-1-a,  
21 corresponds to an entry in a Response Table as depicted in FIG. 13h. The Response entry 235-1-a  
22 has a corresponding text entry, e.g., 235-1-b, which the System uses to display to the consumer the  
23 text 235-1-b and 235-2-b for the possible responses, e.g., 235-1-a and 235-2-a for referenced  
24 question, e.g., 234-1-a.

25 When a consumer inputs a merchandise return request to return at least one item of  
26 merchandise, the system receives the request and uses the situation response table to script an  
27 interactive exchange with the consumer.

28 The System applies the merchant's pre-established return policy by scripting an interactive  
29 exchange with the consumer. The System scripts the interactive exchange with the consumer by  
30 displaying in logical sequence, according to the consumer's responses and according to the logical  
31 relationships defined in the situation response table, the questions defined by the merchant during  
32 the merchant's completion of the Returns Policy Builder function.

33 In the illustrative example for the exemplary embodiment depicted in FIGS. 13e-13h, the  
34 System displays the text 234-1-b of the first question 234-1-a from the set of return questions  
35 established by the merchant. The System receives the consumer's answer in response to that first

1 question. The System then compares the consumer's answer to the first question with the set of  
2 return question responses corresponding to the first question until a match is found. The System  
3 then directs the computer system to execute each instruction in the set of instructions corresponding  
4 to the matching return question response.

5 FIGS. 13i-1 and 13i-2 are high level flow diagrams depicting the flow of logic for applying  
6 a merchant's pre-established return policy logic in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As  
7 depicted in FIGS. 13i-1 and 13i-2, the System initializes a Question number variable, e.g., "X" to  
8 "1" 237. The System accesses the Situation Response Table 312 to retrieve the submatrix for  
9 Question X; using the Question X submatrix, the System then displays the text corresponding to  
10 Question X 238 from the Question Table 313 along with the text and selection buttons for each  
11 response that corresponds to Question X 239 retrieved from the Response Table 314.

12 The Consumer answers the Question X displayed by making a selection from the responses  
13 displayed 274. The System then uses the selected response answer to access the corresponding  
14 response entry in the Situation Response Matrix; the System consecutively uses each of the  
15 instruction entries in the Situation Response Matrix for the selected response answer to access the  
16 Instruction Table 315 to retrieve the appropriate instructions 275.

17 As depicted in FIG. 13i-2, the System executes each instruction for the particular response  
18 entry 276. The System tests to determine whether the instruction directs the System to ask a  
19 question 277. If so, the System sets the Question variable "X" to the Question number setting  
20 indicated by the instruction entry in the Instruction Table 279, accesses the Situation Response  
21 Matrix for the indicated Question, and displays the Question and Response selections for the  
22 indicated Question 238. If the instruction does not direct the System to ask a Question, then the  
23 System checks to determine whether there are further instructions to be executed 278. If so, the  
24 System continues to execute the next instruction 276. Otherwise, the System recognizes that it has  
25 completed the application of the merchant's Return Policy 311.

26 In one embodiment of the invention, the System provides for Policy Exception Categories  
27 and Subcategories at the Policy level (that is, exceptions apply to all Return Questions). At a Policy  
28 level, the System provides the merchant with the capability to specify exception Questions,  
29 Responses and instructions for the excepted product categories and/or subcategories that differ from  
30 the Questions, Responses and instructions for non-excepted product categories and subcategories.

31 In an alternative embodiment of the invention, the System provides for Policy Exception  
32 Categories and Subcategories at a Question level. At a Question level, the System provides the  
33 merchant with the capability to specify exception Responses and instructions for the excepted  
34 product categories and/or subcategories that differ from the Responses and instructions for non-  
35 excepted product categories and subcategories.

1 In still another alternative embodiment, the System provides for Policy Exception  
2 Categories and Subcategories at a Response level. At a Response level, the System provides the  
3 merchant with the capability to specify exception instructions for the excepted product categories  
4 and/or subcategories that differ from the instructions for a particular response for non-excepted  
5 product categories and subcategories.

6 FIG. 13j is a high level data and logic relationship diagram depicting an exemplary Situation  
7 Response flow in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As depicted in FIG. 13j, a Policy  
8 Database 800 contains Policy Data 754 maintained by a Merchant through the Standard Policy  
9 function 753 of the Policy Builder Subsystem 769. The Policy Database 800 contains Situation  
10 Response Data 758-2 and Returns Question Data 758-1 which are maintained by the Merchant  
11 through the Returns Question function 757. The Policy Database 800 contains Policy Exception  
12 Data 760 which is maintained by the Merchant through the Policy Exception function 759. The  
13 Policy Database 800 contains Returns Center Data 758 which is maintained by the Merchant  
14 through the Returns Centers function 755. The Policy Database 800 contains E-Mail Response data  
15 764 which is maintained by the Merchant through the E-Mail Response function 763. The Policy  
16 Database 800 contains Web Links data 762 which is maintained by the Merchant through the Web  
17 Page Links function 761.

18 As depicted in FIG. 13j, the Consumer Returns Subsystem 820 displays the Merchant's  
19 Standard Returns Policy 791. Then, according to the Merchant's Returns Policies, as provided in  
20 the Policy Database 800, the Consumer Returns Subsystem 820 controller 792 selects the  
21 appropriate rules 793 from the appropriate databases 754, 758-1, 758-2, 760, 758, 764, and 762, to  
22 ask the Consumer questions and apply the appropriate rules based on the rules and the consumer's  
23 responses and actions 794, display exceptions based on the rules and the consumer's responses and  
24 actions 795, display shipping options based on the rules and the consumer's responses and actions  
25 796, send automated email messages based on the rules and the consumer's responses and actions  
26 797, and execute the appropriate web links according to the rules and the consumer's responses and  
27 actions 798.

28 Once the Merchant/User has set up the Merchant's Account and Return Policy, the  
29 Merchant is ready for Customers to use the Return System from within the Merchant's online store  
30 web site.

## 31 B. CONSUMER RETURNS

32 FIGS. 20a through 20c are logic flow diagrams depicting an exemplary high level logic flow  
33 for a Consumer's experience with an exemplary embodiment of the Returns System of the present  
34 invention from within a Merchant's Online store. Each of the functions described below with  
35

1 regard to FIGS. 20a through 20c are described in context of exemplary online screens as depicted in  
2 subsequent FIGURES.

3 From within a particular Merchant's Online store, the Consumer (also sometimes referred to  
4 herein as the "Shipper" or "Customer") accesses the Consumer's Order History 360. As was  
5 mentioned above, the Consumer Returns Subsystem is accessed by the Consumer from within the  
6 Merchant's Online Store. As previously mentioned, it should be understood by someone with  
7 ordinary skill in the art that reference herein to Consumer interaction with the Return System is  
8 provided through the Consumer Returns Subsystem provided by the Return System.

9 FIG. 21 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Order History display for a particular  
10 Customer in a particular Merchant's Online store. In an exemplary Merchant's Online Store, as  
11 depicted in FIG. 21, the Merchant displays the Merchant's Logo 380. The exemplary Merchant's  
12 Online Store provides a main menu of options 382, for example, "Welcome", "Online  
13 Merchandise", "Catalog Merchandise", "Place Orders", "Return Merchandise", etc. Further, in the  
14 exemplary Merchant's Online Store, each Page provides a Submenu of options 381 that provide  
15 functionality appropriate for the selected main menu option. In the illustrative FIGURES described  
16 below, the Consumer has entered the Merchant's Online Store, and has entered, for example, the  
17 Return Merchandise page. With the Return Merchandise page, the Merchant's Online Store provides  
18 appropriate Submenu selections 381 that allow the Consumer to view the Consumer's Order History  
19 and access the Consumer Returns Subsystem to return merchandise.

20 In the exemplary Order History display depicted in FIG. 21, the particular Consumer's  
21 Shipped Orders 400 are listed, e.g., 401-1 through 401-7. From the Order History as depicted in  
22 FIG. 21, the Consumer can select a particular order number, e.g., 401-1, by, for example, clicking  
23 the cursor on the order number 401-1.

24 To return an order, or an item from within a particular order, the Consumer selects a  
25 particular order number, e.g., 400. Selecting a the order number 400, causes the Merchant's Online  
26 store system to display an Order Summary 361 as depicted in FIG. 20a. FIG. 22 is a graphic  
27 representation of an exemplary Order Summary Screen for a particular Order Number for a  
28 particular Consumer from within a particular Merchant's Online store in an exemplary embodiment  
29 of the invention.

30 The exemplary embodiment of the invention depicted in FIG. 20a shows that the Merchant's  
31 Online store system accesses the Return System's Tracking Database 115 (which is part of the  
32 Return System's databases 22) to provide the Consumer's Order History and Order Summary  
33 information. In an alternative embodiment, the information necessary to populate the Consumer's  
34 Order History and Order Summary information is contained within the Merchant's store's own  
35 databases.

1           As depicted in FIG. 22, the Return System icon, e.g., 402, is displayed on the Order  
2     Summary Screen. To return a particular item or set of times, the Consumer must click on the Return  
3     System icon 402. As depicted in the Consumer clicks on the Return System icon 402 which causes  
4     the display of a Returns Service Screen. FIG. 23a is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary  
5     Returns Service Screen provided by the Consumer Returns Subsystem in an exemplary Merchant's  
6     Online store in an exemplary embodiment of the invention.

7           In a Returns Service Screen, such as the exemplary one depicted in FIG. 23a, the Merchant's  
8     Standard Policy Overview Statement 420 (e.g., 160 as depicted in FIG. 11) is displayed by  
9     retrieving the Merchant's Policy Overview statement 362 from the Return System Account  
10    Database 106 as depicted in FIG. 20a. As depicted in FIG. 23a, a check box, e.g., 421-1 through  
11    421-7, is displayed next to each ordered item, e.g., 404-1 through 404-7. To return a particular item  
12    or set of times, the Consumer must select the items to be returned 363 as depicted in FIG. 20a. As  
13    depicted in FIG. 23a, a Consumer that wants to return a particular item, e.g., 404-7, checks the  
14    check box 421-7 associated with that item (multiple boxes for multiple items can be checked) and  
15    then clicks the onscreen "Next Step >>" button 422.

16          FIG. 23b is a high level data and logic flow diagram depicting an overview flow of the  
17    Returns System flow in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As depicted in FIG. 23b, the  
18    Merchant establishes the Merchant's returns policy in the Returns Policy Database 800 using the  
19    Returns Manager Subsystem 752. The Consumer Returns Subsystem displays the Merchant's  
20    standard returns policy 791 and walks the Consumer through the appropriate return questions,  
21    applying the appropriate return rules, including exceptions 794 as was previously discussed in detail  
22    with regard to FIG. 13j. The Consumer then uses the System's shipping functionality 802 provided  
23    by the Returns Processing Subsystem 815 in the exemplary embodiment of the invention to return  
24    ship the merchandise 801. Returns shipping processing assigns the returned package a return  
25    tracking number 803. The Return Processing Subsystem provides a Background Tracking Agent  
26    804 that periodically accesses the list of return tracking numbers and in an asynchronous manner  
27    uses the System's multi-carrier tracking function 805 to access the System's tracking servers, e.g.,  
28    21s-21z (as depicted in FIG. 3a) and populate's the return tracking databases 771, 773. The System  
29    provides Consumer tracking of a return shipment 806 through a Consumer Returns Subsystem  
30    access to the Returns Processing Subsystem's Multi-Carrier tracking function 805. The Multi-  
31    Carrier Tracking function is described further below.

32          Once the Background Tracking Agent 804 populates the Tracking Data 771, 773, the  
33    Merchant can view Inbound Shipments through the Inbound Returns Manager 808 which displays  
34    809 Summary Tracking information (Summary Tracking information is depicted in FIG. 46 and  
35    discussed further below). The Merchant can request Shipment Details 810 and as depicted in, e.g.,

1 640 in FIG. 46, in which case the Returns Manager Subsystem will display 811 Inbound Tracking  
2 Detail (Inbound Tracking Detail is depicted in e.g., FIG. 48 and discussed further below).

3 Continuing with the Consumer's experience in the System, once the Consumer clicks the  
4 onscreen Next Step >> button 422, then as depicted in FIG. 20a, the Return System then prompts  
5 the Consumer, through the Consumer Returns Subsystem in the Merchant's Online Store system, to  
6 answer the Merchant's Return Questions and provide the requested Return Reasons 364.

7 FIG. 23c is a high level interactivity diagram depicting an exemplary embodiment of the  
8 interactivity of the Customer Returns Subsystem between a Consumer's Client Machine, Customer  
9 Returns Page, various Customer Returns Subsystem functions, and the Return System servers in an  
10 exemplary embodiment of the invention. As depicted in FIG. 23c, a portion of the Consumer  
11 Returns Subsystem 901 operates on the Consumer's (also referred to here as the Customer) Client  
12 Machine 900. When the Consumer accesses the Merchant's online store, the Merchant's menu  
13 options allow the Consumer to access the Consumer Returns Page 902 from within the Merchant's  
14 online store. From the Consumer Returns Page, the Consumer can access the Consumer Returns  
15 functions such as, for example: Display of the Merchant's Standard Policy and display items  
16 available for return 903 from the Standard Policy data 754; prompt the Consumer for the reason for  
17 the return 904; prompt the Consumer for shipping information such as the carrier with which the  
18 package will be returned and the packaging of the item 905; finalize shipping of package 906; and  
19 print a shipping label 907 saving the shipping label information, such as the tracking number, in a  
20 Return Label database 908. As with the Returns Manager Subsystem, the Consumer Returns  
21 Subsystem uses the Return System's web servers 21m-21r to interact with the Consumer, and uses  
22 the Return System's Database servers 20a-20n to access the various databases in the Policy  
23 Database 800 that are needed to supply the information for the interactivity

24 FIG. 24 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Returns Service Return Reason Screen  
25 in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As depicted in FIG. 24, for the Order selected 401-1,  
26 for the item 404-7 selected to be returned 421-7, the Merchant's Question 206 is asked, prompting  
27 the Consumer with acceptable answers 216, 207, 212, and 220 for selection 427-1 through 427-4. A  
28 Consumer Comments window 425 is provided with up and down scroll buttons 426-1 and 426-2 in  
29 which the Consumer can specify a narrative description. As depicted in FIG. 20a, the Return  
30 System compares the Consumer's Return Reason with the Merchant's Return Policy 365.

31 As depicted in FIG. 20c, according to the Merchant's Return Policy, if the Consumer's  
32 Return Reason is "justified", then the Return System authorizes the return 369 (and according to the  
33 Merchant's Return Policy, pays for the Return Shipping), calculating a Refund Amount and  
34 allowing the Consumer to Launch a Label 370, Print a Shipping Label 371; the Return System  
35 thanks the Consumer 372 and Prepares a Package Return Shipped e-mail 373.

1 As depicted in FIG. 24, a Refund Amount 172 is calculated based upon the standard policy  
2 choices made by the Merchant (Refund Amount 172 = Item Price 173 + Item Tax 174, as depicted  
3 in FIG. 11). When the Consumer has completed the Return Reasons for the particular item, the  
4 Consumer clicks the onscreen "Next Step >>" button 422.

5 FIG. 25 is a graphic representation of an exemplary Return Summary Screen in an  
6 exemplary embodiment of the invention. The Return Summary Screen displays the Merchant's  
7 Response 213-1 (FIG. 25) appropriate for the Consumer's Return Reason 427-3 (FIG. 24) in  
8 response to the Merchant's Return Question 206 (FIG. 24) and possible Return Answers 216, 207,  
9 212 and 220 (FIG. 24). The Return Summary Screen displays the item description of the item being  
10 returned 404-7, the Reason for Return 212, and the Consumer's comments 425. The Return  
11 Summary Screen also displays the item price 173 and the calculated Refund Amount 172.

12 Continuing with FIG. 25, the Return Summary Screen prompts the Consumer to select one  
13 of the Merchant's choices of Carriers 187-1, 188-1, 190 and 184. The Return Summary Screen also  
14 prompts the Consumer to indicate whether 433 or not 434 the returned item is in its original  
15 packaging 432. By pressing the onscreen "Next Step >>" button 422, the Return System displays a  
16 Label Create Screen.

17 FIG. 26 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Label Create Screen in an  
18 exemplary embodiment of the invention. The exemplary Label Create Screen depicted in FIG. 26  
19 notifies the Consumer that the Return Package is ready to be shipped 440 and instructs the  
20 Consumer how to create a shipping label for the package 441 according to the Carrier selected by  
21 the Consumer (431 in FIG. 25).

22 If the Consumer presses the onscreen "Next Step >>" button 422 on the Label Create  
23 Screen, the Return System prepares a Carrier shipping tracking number 450 and an internal Return  
24 System tracking number (see 803, FIG. 23b) for the item package. The Return System prepares a  
25 shipping label for the item package an exemplary embodiment of which is depicted in FIG. 27a.

26 A System tracking number is a unique number generated internally by the System to identify  
27 a particular package shipped using the System. The Shipper inputs the Shipper's Parcel  
28 Specifications for the Subject Parcel. Using each Shipper's Parcel Specifications, the System is  
29 programmed to access databases containing information about each supported Carrier. Each  
30 supported Carrier has a unique rating schedule, delivery and pickup rules and schedules, and  
31 certification requirements (the "Carrier Rules"). The System is further programmed to apply each  
32 supported Carrier's Rules to each Shipper's Parcel Specifications for the corresponding Subject  
33 Parcel.

34 As a result of the Consumer creating a shipping label, the System assigns the package a  
35 System package tracking number and adds a record containing all of the pertinent information about



the package to the System database 22. Following are exemplary Shipping tracking numbers:  
MAGGY841VRY50; MAGGY84B496RF; MAGGY84X0FJ45.

In one embodiment, the System Tracking Number is based on a Base-33 number system. The characters available are: Zero (0) through nine (9) and A through Z excluding "I" (i), "L" (l), and "O" (o). Each letter represents a value, as depicted in the table below:

A = 10 F = 15 M = 20 S = 25 X = 30

B = 11 G = 16 N = 21 T = 26 Y = 31

C = 12 H = 17 P = 22 U = 27 Z = 32

D = 13 J = 18 Q = 23 V = 28

E = 14 K = 19 R = 24 W = 29

Each System Tracking Number is 13 alphanumeric characters. Position 1 is the letter 'M'. Positions 2 - 7 are a System Account number. Positions 8 - 12 are a five-digit ID. Position 13 is a Check Digit.

To calculate the Check Digit, the System performs the following steps: 1) Consecutively multiply the numeric value of each of positions 2-7; 2) Consecutively multiply the numeric value of each of positions 8 - 12; 3) Add both results; 4) Divide by 31; 5) Convert the remainder value to a Base-33 number. The converted value is the Check Digit.

If the Consumer decides to print the label, the Consumer clicks the "Print This Label Now" link 451 on the Print Label Screen as depicted in FIG. 27a.

As mentioned above, in some embodiments, the Shipper can use the System to locally print on the Shipper's printer device a bar-coded shipping label according the Selected Carrier's certification standards. In some embodiments, the bar-coded shipping label, including two dimensional bar code labels, and other types of shipping labels, can be printed on either a thermal label printer or on a laser printer. The Shipper specifies the type of printer to the system during initial setup procedures. Thereafter, the System uses, as appropriate, the thermal printer or laser printer module to prepare the label image for printing on the Shipper's printer.

FIG. 27b depicts a flow diagram of one exemplary embodiment of the aspect of the invention that provides printing of bar-coded shipping labels on printer devices which are compatible with the client system on which the web browser is running, such as an HP-compatible laser printer. As depicted in FIG. 27b, one of the System Servers, for instance, a Shipping Server, e.g., 21s (FIG. 3a), gets the Label Size from the Carrier Label Specification 1250, the Label Layout from the Carrier Label Specification 1251, Label Data from the Shipper Database 1252, and the Label Quality in Dots Per Inch ("DPI") as set by the Server 1253, and uses this information to Generate the Label 1254.

1           The Server then creates, and causes the display on the client browser's display device of, a  
2 text string with a specified font face and in a specified font size in an HTML table data cell with a  
3 specified width 1255. If the client browser is using a 96 display device DPI, the display device will  
4 display said text string in the HTML table data cell in a single line. If on the other hand, the client  
5 browser is using a 120 display device DPI, the display device will display said text string in the  
6 HTML table data cell in two lines.

7           In creating the display of the text string, the Server also sends a message to the Shipper  
8 asking the Shipper to answer the following question: do you see the text string displayed on your  
9 screen as a single line or as wrapped text in multiple lines? The Server receives the Shipper's  
10 response and determines from the response whether the Shipper's display device has displayed the  
11 text as a single line or as wrapped text in multiple lines 1256. If the text is displayed as a single  
12 line, then the client browser 1257 display device DPI is 120. Otherwise, the client browser 1258  
13 display device DPI is 96.

14           Next, the Server calculates the shipping label HTML image size in pixels 1259 by  
15 multiplying the Carrier-specified label size from the Carrier Label Specification times the client  
16 browser display device DPI as determined by the previous step.

17           Next, the System displays the generated label image in the client browser 1260 with an  
18 HTML image tag and an HTML image size in pixels as calculated in the prior step.

19           The client browser calculates the size of the label to be printed in inches by dividing the  
20 label HTML image size in pixels as calculated in a prior step by the client browser display device  
21 DPI 1261; the client browser then prints out the label with the size calculated 1261.

22           FIG. 27c depicts a flow diagram of an exemplary embodiment of the aspect of the invention  
23 that provides printing of dimensionally accurate images, such as dimensionally sensitive  
24 symbologies including two-dimensional bar codes and other two-dimensional machine readable  
25 symbologies. This aspect of the invention provides the printing of such dimensionally accurate  
26 images on various types of printer devices including among others HP-compatible laser printers.  
27 The printer devices can be configured with remote computers, such as PC's, that will receive signals  
28 to print the dimensionally accurate image over a communications network such as the Internet. Each  
29 PC having a client browser or executing like software, and each PC being configured with a pre-  
30 established Image Resolution that applies to the display device and the printer device configured  
31 with the PC.

32           As depicted in FIG. 27c, a computer, such as a Shipping Server 22s (FIG. 3a), determines  
33 the Image Size 1350, the Image Layout 1351, any relevant Image Data 1352, and the Image  
34 Resolution in Dots Per Inch ("DPI") or in any other measure of Image Resolution 1353. The Server  
35 1014 uses this information to Generate the Image 1354.

1           Alternatively, the Image has previously been created; the Server determines from the Image,  
2     the Image Size 1350, the Image Layout 1351, any relevant Image Data 1352, and the Image  
3     Resolution in DPI or in any other measure of Image Resolution 1353 (collectively referred to  
4     hereinafter as the "Image Characteristics").

5           The Server determines the possible Image Resolution Categories and associated values of  
6     client PC's 1354. Image Resolution Categories and associated values include information such as  
7     the number of text strings, and the length of and characteristics (font face, font size, and HTML  
8     table cell width) of each of the identified number of, text strings that must be used to determine the  
9     Image Resolution of client display devices 1356.

10          An HTML table cell width is fixed in that the physical width of the display of the HTML  
11     table cell does not change depending upon the resolution of the client device; a text string comprised  
12     of characters having a particular font and font size has a scalable width, depending upon the  
13     resolution of the client device resolution. Use of an HTML table cell to measure the resolution of  
14     client devices is not a limitation of the invention. In an alternative embodiment, a graphic element  
15     other than an HTML table cell, having a fixed width, is used to measure the resolution of client  
16     devices.

17          The possible Image Resolution Categories and values are stored in the memory of the Server  
18     and updated on some basis. In an alternative embodiment, the possible Image Resolution  
19     Categories and values are input into the Server computer.

20          The Server then analyzes the Image Characteristics, and the possible Image Resolution  
21     categories and/or values 1355, and creates the appropriate number of text strings and associated  
22     HTML table cells 1356. Each text string is created to have a specified font face, a specified font  
23     size, and an associated HTML table cell with a specified width 1357. The computer then causes the  
24     display of the text strings in the associated HTML table cells on the remote client PC's display  
25     device 1358.

26          In creating the display of the text string, the Server also sends a message to the recipient PC  
27     asking the user to answer the following question: is the first text string displayed on your screen as a  
28     single line or as wrapped text in multiple lines? The Server receives the remote user's response and  
29     determines from the response whether the remote user's PC's display device has displayed each of  
30     the text strings as a single line or as wrapped text in multiple lines in a manner similar to that  
31     depicted in FIG. 27b, 1256 - 1258. The Server then sets the PC's Remote Image Resolution for  
32     printing the Image 1359 according to the results of the user's PC's display of the text strings.

33          Next, the Server calculates the Remote HTML Image Size in pixels 1360 by multiplying the  
34     Image Size times the PC's Remote Image Resolution as determined by the previous step.

1           Next, the Server displays the generated image on the display device of the remote PC 1361  
2   with an HTML image tag and the Remote HTML Image Size in pixels as calculated in the prior  
3   step.

4           The client browser of the remote PC calculates the size of the Image to be printed ("Remote  
5   Print Image Size") in inches by dividing the Remote HTML Image Size in pixels by the Remote  
6   Image Resolution 1362; the client browser then prints out the Image with the Remote Print Image  
7   Size 1362.

8           In one embodiment of the invention, instead of printing a shipping label at the Shipper's  
9   printer, a Package Number is displayed online on a Package Number Screen with notification that  
10   the label will be printed at a shipping location previously designated by the Shipper.

11          After the Consumer has printed a shipping label, as depicted in FIG. 28, the Return System  
12   then thanks the Consumer 455 and allows the Consumer to either return to the Merchant's Home  
13   Page, e.g., 456, or return to the Consumer's Order History 406. The option to return to the  
14   Consumer's Order History 406 is an option on most of the Consumer Return System Screens  
15   described above (FIGS. 22-26, 28).

16          Once the Consumer has printed a shipping label, the Return System generates a Return  
17   Shipped e-mails, one to the Merchant, an exemplary embodiment of which is depicted in FIG. 29,  
18   and one to the Consumer, an exemplary embodiment of which is depicted in FIG. 30.

19          Returning to FIG. 20a, if the Consumer provides a Return Reason that is not considered  
20   "justified" by the Merchant, then a different set of functions is performed by the Return System. In  
21   FIG. 31, the Consumer requests 421-5 to return an item 404-5. In FIG. 32, the Consumer indicates  
22   as a Return Reason a reason 427-1/216. The Return System compares the reason 216 to the  
23   Merchant's Return Policy 365, as depicted in FIG. 20a. In this case, the Return System determines  
24   that the reason is not justified. Accordingly, the Return System, as instructed by the Merchant's  
25   Return Policy, requires that the Consumer pay for return shipping.

26          As depicted in FIGS. 20a through 20c, in order to pay for return shipping, the Return System  
27   prompts the Consumer to specify Return Shipping Preferences 366, prepares and displays a Graphic  
28   Comparison of the costs of shipping the item with a plurality of Carriers and Services 367, and  
29   prompts the Consumer to select and pay for shipping the package according to the Carrier and  
30   Service selected 368, before allowing the Consumer to create and print a return shipping label 370 -  
31   371.

32          Accordingly, when the Consumer then clicks the onscreen "Next Step >>" button 422, as  
33   depicted in FIG. 32, the Return System displays a series of Consumer Shipping Preferences  
34   Specification Screens, exemplary embodiments of which are depicted in FIGS. 33-35. In the  
35   Consumer Shipping Preferences Specifications Screen depicted in FIG. 33, the Return System

1 prompts the Consumer to identify a Carrier 469 from a selection of Carriers and Return Locations  
2 470-474 that were allowed by the Merchant (FIG. 12, 192-195, 181, 184); specify item packaging  
3 475 as original 476 or not 477; and specify payment information 478 - 487. Once the Consumer has  
4 completed the necessary information, the Return System validates the Consumer supplied  
5 information. If the Consumer clicks the onscreen "Next Step >>" button 422, the Return System  
6 displays a subsequent Consumer Shipping Preferences Specification Screen, as depicted in FIG. 34.

7 In the Consumer Shipping Preferences Specification Screens depicted in FIG. 34, the Return  
8 System prompts the Consumer to specify the package weight 500, packaging type information 501-  
9 505, package dimensions 506-507, origination postal code 510, destination postal code 511, the  
10 destination address city 512, the destination address country 513, the destination delivery address  
11 type 514-515, and loss protection coverage 516. Once the Consumer completes this information, if  
12 the Consumer clicks the onscreen Continue button 422, the Return System displays a subsequent  
13 Consumer Shipping Preferences Specification Screen, as depicted in FIG. 35.

14 In the Consumer Shipping Preferences Specification Screens depicted in FIG. 35, the Return  
15 System prompts the Consumer to specify the Carriers that the Consumer is willing to use, e.g. 520-  
16 523; the Consumer's ship from location 524 (a pull down menu of which is available by clicking the  
17 pull down menu button 525) and 526 (Advanced options); the shipping date 530 (with scroll down  
18 button 531); and tracking capabilities 532-533. If the Consumer needs additional information, the  
19 Consumer clicks the Learn More button 527 which is contextually sensitive as to which shipping  
20 specifications are involved. Once the Consumer completes the information, the Return System  
21 validates the information. The Consumer can return to a previous specification screen by clicking  
22 the onscreen "<< Back" button 540, or can go to the next step by clicking the onscreen "Continue  
23 >>" button 422.

24 If the Consumer has completed all of the necessary specification information and clicks the  
25 onscreen "Continue >>" button 422, the Return System generates and displays a Graphic Cost  
26 Comparison of the selected Carriers and available Carrier Services, exemplary embodiments of  
27 which are depicted in FIGS. 36a and 37.

28 In an exemplary embodiment of the invention, the System uses MTX.exe as a transaction  
29 server. MTX.exe is an executable program that is part of the Microsoft suite of Internet web  
30 solution products.

31 In the exemplary embodiment of the System, Web pages are grouped in organization units  
32 referred to as "virtual directories." For example, in the exemplary embodiment, all of the user  
33 interface Web pages that prompt a user to input registration data, and that provide interactive  
34 feedback to the registering user, would be grouped into a virtual directory. When a request for a  
35 particular Web page is received by a particular shipping Web server, the shipping Web server

1 determines which virtual directory is needed. Depending on the virtual directory to be accessed,  
2 MTX.exe loads one of a plurality of COM objects, which are DLL's (Dynamic Link Libraries), for  
3 the System. One of the COM objects for the exemplary embodiment of the system is referred to as  
4 the Rating.DLL.

5 Each Enterprise user is enabled to process one or more Carriers from a plurality of Carriers  
6 supported by the system. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, when a user, through the  
7 user's client PC, issues a rating request, the System passes a list of carrier identifiers for the carriers  
8 enabled for that user to the Rating.DLL operating on the shipping Web server to which the rating  
9 request is directed.

10 The Rating.DLL consists of various rating-related functions, one of which is referred to as  
11 "Get\_Rate\_Function". Get\_Rate\_Function receives as input the carrier IDs for the carriers enabled  
12 for the particular user, package information, shipping information, including origin and destination  
13 postal codes, and other information. Get\_Rate\_Function parses the received input information.  
14 Get\_Rate\_Function tests the carrier ID to determine the name of one of a plurality of Carrier-  
15 specific shipment rating routines that is to be performed in order to rate shipments for the particular  
16 carrier ID. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, the Carrier-specific shipment rating  
17 routines are SQL Stored Procedures that are executed by the appropriate SQL Database Server.  
18 Get\_Rate\_Function then causes the appropriate Carrier-specific shipment rating routine to be  
19 performed to rate the User-specified shipment according to the relevant Carrier's business rules.

20 FIG. 36a depicts an exemplary Dynamically Dimensioned Multi-Carrier, Multi-Service  
21 Graphic Array online display as part of an exemplary supplemental Shipper Parcel Specification  
22 Input Screen. In the embodiment of the Graphic Array depicted in FIG. 36a, the particular screen is  
23 titled the Rates and Times Screen.

24 As depicted in FIG. 36a, the exemplary Graphic Array contains the following information  
25 and display elements: 1) valid delivery dates 1063 (1063-1 through 1063-3) across the top of the  
26 graphic display for the selected Ship Date; 2) sorted, valid delivery times 1064 (1064-1 through  
27 1064-6) for all valid dates down the left side of the graphic display; and 3) color coded by Carrier,  
28 Carrier cell entries, e.g., 1065, for each available rate, by date and time.

29 In the exemplary embodiment depicted in FIG. 36a the Graphic Array comprises an array of  
30 intersecting rows and columns. Each column corresponds to a day and date of parcel delivery. In  
31 FIG. 36a, the days and dates of delivery shown are "TUE 28 SEP 99" (1063-1), "WED 29 SEP 99"  
32 (1063-2) and "THU 30 SEP 99" (1063-3). As depicted in FIG. 36a, space for other columns (1063-  
33 4 through 1063-7) are available for display; in the case of the example depicted in FIG. 36a  
34 however, no dates are displayed in those columns.

Each row of the Graphic Array corresponds to a time of delivery. In FIG. 36a, the times of delivery are shown as "8:00 AM" (1064-1), "10:30 AM" (1064-2), "12:00 PM" (1064-3), "3:00 PM" (1064-4), "4:30 PM" (1064-5), and "5:00 PM" (1064-6).

At the intersection of each row (1064-1 through 1064-6) and column (1063-1 through 1063-7) of the Graphic Array is a "cell." In FIG. 36a, cells will be referred to by the element 1071, and by the intersecting row (1 through 6) and column (1 through 7) the intersection of which forms the space for each cell (1071-1-1, 1071-1-2, . . . 1071-6-7). Some of the cells depicted in FIG. 36a are empty, e.g., 1071-5-1, 1071-6-1, 1071-6-3, 1071-6-4. Empty cells represent the circumstances that none of the Carriers supported by the System (the "supported Carriers") support delivery of the Subject Parcel for the time and date for which that cell represents the intersection.

Some cells depicted in FIG. 36a have one or more cell entries. In FIG. 36a, each cell entry represents a particular Carrier. Each Carrier cell entry is color coded with a unique color, the unique color corresponding to a particular Carrier as is discussed in more detail below; each Carrier cell entry contains a graphic element, e.g., 1147a, and a monetary amount, e.g., 1147b, which represents the price for which the corresponding Carrier would deliver the subject parcel. For instance, cell 1071-1-1 contains a single Carrier cell entry 1148. Cell 1071-3-1 contains two Carrier cell entries 1065 and 1149.

A color-coding legend 1062 is displayed on the Screen to identify by a name (1140b, 1141b, 1142b, and 1143b) and a color-coding symbol (1140a, 1141a, 1142a, and 1143a), each of the supported Carriers that provide the service according to the particular Shipper's Parcel Specifications for the particular Subject Parcel.

For purposes of this application, unique colors are depicted with graphic symbols. For example, a right-diagonal hash mark symbol 1140a is used herein to represent the color red; a left-diagonal hash mark symbol 1141a is used herein to represent the color purple; a vertical hash mark symbol 1142a is used to represent the color amber; and a horizontal hash mark symbol 1143a is used to represent the color blue. The particular hash mark symbols used herein and the colors mentioned herein are exemplary and are not a limitation of the invention.

Each cell of the Graphic Array that is not empty contains one or more color-coded Carrier cell entries. For example, in FIG. 36a, cell 1071-3-1 contains two Carrier cell entries, 1065 and 1149. Carrier cell entry 1065 is color-coded with the right-diagonal hash mark symbol (representing the color red) which, according to the color-coding legend 1062, corresponds 1140a with the Carrier identified as "Airborne" 1140b. Carrier cell entry 1149 is color coded with the horizontal hash mark symbol (representing the color purple) which, according to the color-coding legend 1062, corresponds 1143a with the Carrier identified as "USPS" 1143b.

1        Each Carrier cell entry, e.g., 1065, contains a graphic element, e.g., 1065a, which contains  
2        what is known as "ALT text". As depicted in FIG. 36a, a Shipper viewing the Graphic Array online  
3        can place the PC's cursor on the graphic element, e.g., 1065a of a particular Carrier cell entry, e.g.,  
4        1065, to display a pop-up screen 1069 that displays the ALT text for that particular Carrier cell  
5        entry. In some embodiments, the ALT text will be displayed by merely placing the cursor over the  
6        graphic element for a particular Carrier cell entry and leaving the cursor in that position for a certain  
7        time interval. In alternative embodiments, the Shipper must click on the graphic element for a  
8        particular Carrier cell entry in order to display the ALT text. In the exemplary embodiment depicted  
9        in FIG. 36a, the displayed ALT text, e.g., the text displayed in pop-up screen 1069, contains the full  
10       Carrier name (in the depicted case, "Airborne Express") and the full Carrier service name (in the  
11       depicted case, "Express Overnight Service") for the Carrier 1140b (in this case, Airborne) to which  
12       that Carrier cell entry corresponds.

13       As depicted in FIG. 36a, the color for the Carrier identified as "Airborne" 1140b is depicted  
14       in the color coding legend 1062 with a right-diagonal cross-hatch symbol 1140a. Accordingly, each  
15       Carrier cell entry contained within the Graphic Array with the right-diagonal cross-hatch symbol,  
16       e.g., 1065, corresponds to a delivery of the Subject Parcel supported by the Carrier "Airborne."  
17       Appearing in each of the color-coded Carrier cell entries, e.g., 1065 is a graphic element, e.g.,  
18       1065a, and a monetary value, e.g., 1065b. The monetary value, e.g., 1065b corresponds to the price  
19       that the corresponding Carrier would charge to deliver the Subject Parcel according to the time  
20       1064-3 and date 1063-1 specified according to the row and column of which the intersection (which,  
21       in the case described is cell 1071-3-1) contains the Carrier cell entry 1065. For example, as depicted  
22       in FIG. 36a, the Carrier cell entry 1065, depicted with the right-diagonal cross-hatch symbol,  
23       contains the monetary amount "\$9.00." Accordingly, the amount \$9.00 is the price that the Carrier  
24       Airborne would charge to deliver the Subject Parcel at the identified time of 12:00 p.m. 1064-3 on  
25       the identified date of Tuesday, September 28, 1999 1063-1.

26       Similarly, as depicted in FIG. 36a, the color for the Carrier identified as "FedEx" 1141b is  
27       depicted in the color coding legend 1062 with a left-diagonal cross-hatch symbol 1141a.  
28       Accordingly, each Carrier cell entry contained within the Graphic Array with the left-diagonal  
29       cross-hatch symbol, e.g., 1147, corresponds to a delivery of the Subject Parcel supported by the  
30       Carrier "FedEx."

31       Further, as depicted in FIG. 36a, the color for the Carrier identified as "UPS" is depicted in  
32       the color coding legend 1062 with a vertical cross-hatch symbol 1142. Accordingly, each Carrier  
33       cell entry contained within the Graphic Array with the vertical cross-hatch symbol, e.g., 1148,  
34       corresponds to a delivery of the Subject Parcel supported by the Carrier "UPS."



1 Similarly, as depicted in FIG. 36a, the color for the Carrier identified as "USPS" is depicted  
2 in the color coding legend 1062 with a horizontal cross-hatch symbol 1143. Accordingly, each  
3 Carrier cell entry contained within the Graphic Array with the horizontal cross-hatch symbol, e.g.,  
4 1149, corresponds to a delivery of the Subject Parcel supported by the Carrier "UPS."

5 In the embodiment of the Graphic Array depicted in FIG. 36a, the Graphic Array is  
6 dynamically dimensioned. For instance, only the dates and days (1063-1 through 1063-3) for which  
7 delivery that conforms to the particular Shipper's Parcel Specifications for the particular Subject  
8 Parcel are displayed across the top of the graphic. For example, for the date Tuesday, September  
9 28, 1999 (1063-1), at the time 5:00 p.m. (1064-6), no Carrier supports delivery of the Subject  
10 Parcel.

11 Further, as depicted in FIG. 36a, only the times (1064-1 through 1064-6) during which at  
12 least one of the Carrier/Services identified as supporting the delivery are displayed along the  
13 viewer's left side of the Dynamically Dimensioned Multi-Carrier Graphic Array online display.

14 Still further, as depicted in FIG. 36a, a Carrier cell entry, e.g., 1065, is displayed for each of,  
15 but only for each of, the Carriers/Services that support delivery for a particular day and time in the  
16 cell of the Graphic Array that represents delivery on a particular day and at a particular time. When  
17 the circumstances require, the System displays one or more Carrier cell entries in a single cell. For  
18 instance, cell 1071-3-1 contains two entries, 1065 and 1149; whereas cell 1071-1-1 contains only a  
19 single cell 1148. Accordingly, as depicted in FIG. 36a, the cell size expands vertically to  
20 accommodate multiple Carrier cell entries.

21 In the exemplary embodiment depicted in FIG. 36a, the color-coding legend 1062 for each  
22 of the Carriers/Services represented in the Graphic Array is displayed with color-coding graphic  
23 elements (1140a through 1143a) and identification labels (1140b through 1143b) for each relevant  
24 Carrier/Service along the viewer's right side of the rating and timing graphic. Alternatively, instead  
25 of the printed name, the logo for the particular Carrier/Service can be displayed. As another  
26 alternative, the Carrier/Service logo can be displayed in color in the color-coding legend 1062.

27 The particular arrangement of the color legend 1062 depicted in FIG. 36a and the particular  
28 colors used in the color legend depicted therein are exemplary and are not a limitation of the  
29 invention. In an alternative embodiment, instead of using color, other visually distinctive methods  
30 are used to differentiate between different Carriers/Services. For instance, other visually distinctive  
31 methods of Carrier/Service differentiation include but are not limited to: three-dimensional texture  
32 effects, other three-dimensional effects, two-dimensional markings (for instance, dots, cross-  
33 hatching, and the like), lighting effects, graphic symbols (for instance, the logos of the  
34 Carriers/Services) and any combination of the aforementioned features with color.

1 In the embodiment of the Graphic Array depicted in FIG. 36a, the exemplary Graphic Array  
2 is depicted as horizontally wide enough to accommodate seven delivery days (1063-1 through 1063-  
3 7) within a particular delivery timespan. The depiction in FIG. 36a of the Graphic Array as a fixed  
4 size accommodating up to seven delivery days is exemplary and is not a limitation of the invention.  
5 In alternative embodiments, the Graphic Array online display collapses or expands in total size to  
6 reflect the actual number of rows and columns that need to be present in order to display the Carrier  
7 cell entries for the Carriers/Services that support delivery of the Subject Parcel according to the  
8 Shipper's Parcel Specifications.

9 The arrangement as depicted in FIG. 36a of the parcel delivery days and dates (1063-1  
10 through 1063-7) across the top and the parcel delivery times (1064-1 through 1064-6) along the left  
11 side of the Graphic Array is exemplary and is not a limitation of the invention. In one alternative  
12 embodiment, the parcel delivery days and dates are displayed across the bottom, and the parcel  
13 delivery times are displayed on the viewer's right side, of the Graphic Array. In other alternative  
14 embodiments, the parcel delivery days are arranged on one of the two sides of the Graphic Array  
15 and the parcel delivery times are arranged along the top or the bottom of the Graphic Array. In such  
16 an alternative embodiment, the cells of the Graphic Array are expandable horizontally to  
17 accommodate the appropriate number of relevant Carriers/Services.

18 As depicted in FIG. 36a, the Shipper is asked to input the Expected Ship Date 1060. In the  
19 exemplary embodiment depicted, a drop down menu activation mechanism 1061 provides the  
20 Shipper the ability to activate a pull down menu (not shown) of seven entries beginning with the  
21 current date and includes the six days immediately following the current date. The format used is  
22 "M/D/YY - Day name". "Today" and "Tomorrow" are displayed appropriately. The number of  
23 entries provided by the selection mechanism, the format of the Expected Ship Date, and other  
24 features described herein are exemplary and are not a limitation of the invention.

25 In the exemplary embodiment depicted in FIG. 36a, once the Shipper selects the Expected  
26 Ship Date, the System uses the Expected Ship date and the other information provided by the  
27 Shipper, as in the screens depicted in FIGS. 25, 34, and 35 described above, to access the Carrier  
28 Rules, apply the Carrier Rules, and prepare the Graphic Array containing the delivery prices and  
29 delivery times for the Subject Parcel according to the Shipper's Parcel Specifications. The System  
30 will then generate the signals necessary to display the Graphic Array and cause the Graphic Array to  
31 be displayed on the Shipper's PC.

32 Once the Graphic Array is displayed, the Shipper can change previously input information  
33 and the System will automatically regenerate the Graphic Array with the delivery rates and delivery  
34 times that have been updated to reflect the new information. For instance, if the Shipper selects a

1 new shipping date, the System will regenerate the Graphic Array with the appropriate new rates and  
2 times. The logic for regenerating the Graphic Array is described in more detail below.

3 In the exemplary embodiment depicted in FIG. 36a, a Ship Location Type drop down menu  
4 activator 1067 is located below the Graphic Array. The particular location of the Ship Location  
5 Type selection mechanism as described herein is exemplary and is not a limitation of the invention.  
6 If the Shipping Location class is a "ship center", a "Find Location" button 1068 is displayed next to  
7 the drop down menu. In order to open the Drop Off Locator in a pop-up window, the Shipper places  
8 the Shipper's PC cursor on the "Find Location" button 1068 and clicking the Shipper's user input  
9 device. The Origin Zip Code and Ship Location type values supplied by the Shipper are used as  
10 parameters for the Drop Off Locator to locate a list possible Drop Off Location choices. The  
11 Shipper can select a Drop Off Location from the Drop Off Locator menu. The system dynamically  
12 responds to changes by the Shipper to Origin Zip Code and Ship Location type to present choices of  
13 Drop Off Location choices.

14 Navigational buttons appear at the bottom of the Rates and Times Screen depicted in FIG.  
15 36a. Clicking the "Back" button 1070 will return the Shipper to the previously displayed screen.  
16 Clicking the "Next" button 1054 will cause the System to display the next screen.

17 If a user returns to the Rates and Times Screen (FIG. 36a) from any of the Specification  
18 Screens, e.g., FIGS. 33-35, any Specification changes will effect the displayed rates.

19 Using the subject parcel's Parcel Specifications, the System is programmed to access  
20 databases containing information about each supported Carrier. Each supported Carrier has a  
21 unique rating schedule, delivery and pickup rules and schedules, and certification requirements (the  
22 "Carrier Rules"). The System is further programmed to apply each supported Carrier's Rules to  
23 each Shipper's Parcel Specifications for the corresponding Subject Parcel. The System calculates  
24 the Shipping Charges based on zip-to-zip pricing where the Seller has provided the origin zip code  
25 and the Buyer has provided the destination zip code.

26 To develop the rates for display in the Graphic Array, the System rating component is  
27 instantiated in the server-side script. The rating component's rate information method is invoked  
28 with the rate parameters embedded in the URL. Based on Carriers' business rules, the rates and their  
29 service option charges for all Carriers/Services are calculated from each respective Carrier's zone  
30 data, service/delivery time data and rate data.

31 The System keeps the Carrier data up-to-date in the System database 22. The application  
32 does not use any carriers' Application Program Interface (API) functions to get the rate information.  
33 All of carrier rate data is stored in the System database 22 and all business rules to calculate the  
34 rates are implemented within the System.

1        FIGS. 36b through 36e are high level data retrieval and logic flow diagrams depicting the  
2        data and high level logic that the system uses to calculate a shipping rate. As depicted in FIG. 36b,  
3        the following shipping information is used to calculate a shipping rate: Origin postal code,  
4        Destination postal code, Weight, Packaging, Drop off / Pickup, Country code 3001. For each Carrier  
5        3002, the rating component of the System uses the origin and destination postal codes 3003. The  
6        rating component of the System obtains 3003 the zone id from the zone table 3008 and gathers 3004  
7        the time for deliveries for all available services from the service delivery time table 3009. From the  
8        rate table 3010, the rating component obtains services charges for the zone id, packaging type and  
9        weight 3005. For each service, the rating component gathers all possible service options charges  
10       3006. After gathering necessary information, the rating component returns an array of rate  
11       information 3007. Each element in the array represents a Carrier/Service and consists of service  
12       charge, service option charges, and delivery times.

13       The System calculates the rates according to the following overview logic as depicted in  
14       FIGS. 36c-36d. The System retrieves all rate IDs (published, net, and retail) by joining the following  
15       database tables on the System's AccountNo: AccountAndCarrierAcnt; CarrierAccount;  
16       RateDefinition 3020.

17       The System then determines the billing rules for all of the Carrier/Service combinations and  
18       their service options by joining the following tables on CarrierID, ServiceID, and ServiceOptionID:  
19       BillingOption; BillingOptionAndService; BillingOptionAndServiceOption 3021.

20       For each carrier 3022, the System performs the following procedures: 1) determine if the  
21       particular carrier supports the given billing option based on step 2 3026. If not, continue with the  
22       next carrier 3027; 2) Apply carrier business rules, including: a) Calculate dimensional weight 3023;  
23       b) Determine billable weight 3024: actual weight, dimensional weight, oversize weight or letter  
24       weight; c) Validate package weight and dimensions 3025; (If the rate input violate carrier business  
25       rules 3026, continue to next carrier 3027); 3) Determine the zone ID from CarrierZone table for the  
26       given origin/destination postal codes 3028; 4) Determine service delivery times 3029 (including  
27       Saturday/Sunday delivery times) by joining the following tables on destination postal code: a)  
28       CarrierDeliveryArea; b) CarrierServiceDelTime; 5) Determine all service charges from CarrierRate  
29       table by RateID, ZoneID, ServiceID and Weight 3030; 6) Determine the service option charges for  
30       each Carrier/Service 3031 by joining the following tables on CarrierID and ServiceID:  
31       ServiceOption; ServiceOptionAttribute ServiceAndServiceOption; and 7) Apply billing option to  
32       service option charges 3032 (different service option charges could be billed to different parties for  
33       various billing options).

34       As depicted in FIG. 36e, the expected delivery times for each Carrier/Service returned in the  
35       rate information determine the placement of the rate grid for the particular Carrier/Service cell: the

1 delivery date determines the columns 3040 while the delivery time resolves the rows 3041. In the  
2 event that multiple rate entries collide 3042, the alphabetical order of the particular Carrier's name is  
3 further used to determine the Graphic Array entry order within the same date and time bucket 3043.  
4 The same Carrier/Service can be placed in a second time slot in the grid under Saturday or Sunday  
5 column 3045 if the Saturday or Sunday delivery is applicable to the particular Carrier/Service 3044.

6 As depicted in FIG. 37, the Consumer can indicate a preference for a guaranteed delivery  
7 time 550-552. If the Consumer is satisfied with the Comparison, the Consumer can choose a  
8 particular Carrier and Service by clicking on the corresponding cell, e.g., 549, in the Graphic  
9 Comparison Array. If the Consumer is not satisfied with the Comparison, the Consumer clicks the  
10 onscreen << Back button 540. If the Consumer wants to only change the Consumer's indication of  
11 the guarantee of delivery time 550-552, the Consumer clicks the onscreen Update button 560. If the  
12 Consumer is satisfied, has chosen a particular Carrier cell entry, e.g., 549, then the Consumer clicks  
13 the onscreen Done button 561.

14 Once the Consumer clicks the onscreen Done button 561, the Return System displays a  
15 Shipping Summary Screen, an exemplary embodiment of which is depicted in FIG. 38.

16 From the Shipping Summary Screen, the Consumer can create and print a shipping label, as  
17 is described elsewhere herein, and the Return System will generate and send thank you messages  
18 and e-mails.

19 FIGS. 39a through 39c are simplified flow diagrams depicting the initial Timing and Rating  
20 procedure to generate a Graphic Array in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. In the  
21 embodiment of the invention depicted in FIGS. 39a through 39c, the functions of the Shipper  
22 entering shipping information 1150, displaying errors to the Shipper that insufficient shipping  
23 information has been provided and prompting the Shipper for additional information 1153, and  
24 displaying the Carrier/Service rate and time graphic 1160, are all processed by the Web Browser at  
25 the Client. In the embodiment depicted, all other functions and processes depicted in FIGS. 39a  
26 through 39c are performed by one or more of the System Servers.

27 It should be noted that the depicted separation of functions between the Web Browser at the  
28 Client on the one hand and the Return System Servers on the other hand represents an initial  
29 procedure to construct the Graphic Array in response to initial Shipper input of Shipper Parcel  
30 Specifications. As is explained in more detail below, after the initial construction of the Graphic  
31 Array, the System can distribute certain of the functions for supplemental regeneration of the  
32 Graphic Array to the Web Browser Client.

33 As depicted in FIG. 39a, the Shipper (User) enters shipping information (Shipper Parcel  
34 Specifications) 1150. The System validates the shipping information 1151.

1 In the embodiment depicted, at a minimum, the System requires Source Postal Code,  
2 Destination Postal Code, Parcel Weight, Type of Shipment, and the Shipping Location in order to  
3 determine a timing schedule and rates for each supported Carrier. If the Shipper has not provided at  
4 least these minimum specifications, then the System displays error messages 1153 prompting the  
5 Shipper to input further Shipper Parcel Specifications 1150.

6 If the Shipper has supplied the minimum required specifications, then the System accesses  
7 the Shipper Database 1195 to identify any user-specified Carrier designations and to determine the  
8 Carrier accounts for the appropriate Shipper 1154. Using the Shipper Parcel Specifications, the  
9 System then accesses the Carrier Databases (1404a through 1404n) and determines all possible  
10 Carrier/Services that support shipping of the subject parcel 1155.

11 It should be noted that in some embodiments, the Shipper can restrict the identity of Carriers  
12 to be used in the construction of the Graphic Array. A Shipper may choose to restrict the System to  
13 certain Carriers, for instance, if the Shipper prefers to work only with certain Carriers.

14 The System then examines each Carrier/Service in the set of supporting Carrier/Services  
15 1156. The next step 1157 is a juncture for return of control from a number of points in the System  
16 logic and is performed for each Carrier/Service in the set of supporting Carrier/Services.

17 If the System has examined all possible supporting Carrier/Services 1158, the System  
18 assembles the Graphic Array from the delivery rate set 1159 and displays the Graphic Array to the  
19 user 1160. As was previously explained, the dimensions of the Graphic Array are dynamic.

20 As long as there are further Carrier/Services that remain to be examined in the set of  
21 supporting Carrier Services, the System continues to perform the process described below.

22 Using the Expected Shipping Date, the System switches the Carrier/Service's shipping  
23 timespan into possible delivery dates and times 1161. Next 1162, the System determines whether  
24 the shipping timespan ends on a Saturday 1163. If so, the System accesses the Carrier Database  
25 (1404a through 1404n) to determine whether the particular Carrier/Service supports Saturday  
26 Delivery 1164. If the particular Carrier/Service does not support Saturday Delivery, then the  
27 particular Carrier/Service is eliminated 1177 from the delivery rate set and the System proceeds with  
28 the next Carrier/Service in the delivery rate set 1157.

29 If the particular Carrier/Service supports Saturday Delivery, the System determines the  
30 appropriate Saturday delivery rate for the particular Carrier/Service 1165.

31 Next, the System determines whether the shipping timespan ends on a Sunday 1168. If the  
32 shipping timespan ends on a Sunday, the System accesses the Carrier Database (1404a through  
33 1404n) to determine whether the particular Carrier/Service supports Sunday delivery 1166. If the  
34 particular Carrier/Service does not support Sunday delivery, then the particular Carrier/Service is

1 eliminated from the delivery rate set 1177 and the System proceeds with the next Carrier/Service in  
2 the delivery rate set 1157.

3 If the particular Carrier/Service supports Sunday Delivery, the System determines the  
4 appropriate Sunday delivery rate for the particular Carrier/Service 1167.

5 The System then determines whether there is a business day delivery within the shipping  
6 timespan 1169. If so, the System accesses the Carrier Database (1404a through 1404n) to determine  
7 whether the particular Carrier/Service supports business day delivery 1170. If the particular  
8 Carrier/Service does not support business day delivery, then the particular Carrier/Service is  
9 eliminated from the delivery rate set 1177 and the System proceeds with the next Carrier/Service in  
10 the delivery rate set 1157.

11 If the particular Carrier/Service supports business day delivery, the System determines the  
12 appropriate business day delivery rate for the particular Carrier/Service 1171.

13 The System next determines whether the Shipper has requested E-Mail delivery notification  
14 1172. If so, the System accesses the Carrier Database (1404a through 1404n) to determine whether  
15 the particular Carrier/Service supports E-Mail delivery notification 1173. If the particular  
16 Carrier/Service does not support E-Mail delivery notification, then the particular Carrier/Service is  
17 eliminated from the delivery rate set 1177 and the System proceeds with the next Carrier/Service in  
18 the delivery rate set 1157.

19 If the particular Carrier/Service supports E-Mail delivery notification, the System adds the  
20 appropriate charge for the E-Mail delivery notification service to each of the particular  
21 Carrier/Service's delivery rates 1174.

22 The System then determines whether the Shipper has requested verbal delivery notification  
23 1175. If so, the System accesses the Carrier Database (1404a through 1404n) to determine whether  
24 the particular Carrier/Service supports verbal delivery notification 1176. If the particular  
25 Carrier/Service does not support verbal delivery notification, then the particular Carrier/Service is  
26 eliminated from the delivery rate set 1177 and the System proceeds with the next Carrier/Service in  
27 the delivery rate set 1157.

28 If the particular Carrier/Service supports verbal delivery notification, the System adds the  
29 appropriate charge for the verbal delivery notification service to each of the particular  
30 Carrier/Service's delivery rates 1178.

31 Next 1179, the System determines whether the Shipper has requested that the  
32 Carrier/Service guarantee delivery time 1180. If so, the System accesses the Carrier Database  
33 (1404a through 1404n) to determine whether the particular Carrier/Service supports guaranteed  
34 delivery times 1181. If the particular Carrier/Service does not support guaranteed delivery times,

1 then the particular Carrier/Service is eliminated from the delivery rate set 1177 and the System  
2 proceeds with the next Carrier/Service in the delivery rate set 1157.

3 If the particular Carrier/Service supports guaranteed delivery times, the System adds the  
4 appropriate charge for the guaranteed delivery times service to each of the particular  
5 Carrier/Service's delivery rates 1182.

6 The System then determines whether the Shipper has requested a "Call for Pickup" shipping  
7 location 1184. If so, the System accesses the Carrier Database (1404a through 1404n) to determine  
8 whether the particular Carrier/Service supports "Call for Pickup" services 1185. If the particular  
9 Carrier/Service does not support "Call for Pickup" services, then the particular Carrier/Service is  
10 eliminated from the delivery rate set 1177 and the System proceeds with the next Carrier/Service in  
11 the delivery rate set 1157.

12 If the particular Carrier/Service supports "Call for Pickup" services, the System adds the  
13 appropriate charge for the "Call for Pickup" service to each of the particular Carrier/Service's  
14 delivery rates 1186.

15 The System next determines whether the Shipper has requested a "Residential Delivery"  
16 1187. If so, the System accesses the Carrier Database (1404a through 1404n) to determine whether  
17 the particular Carrier/Service supports "Residential Delivery" services 1188. If the particular  
18 Carrier/Service does not support "Residential Delivery" services, then the particular Carrier/Service  
19 is eliminated from the delivery rate set 1177 and the System proceeds with the next Carrier/Service  
20 in the delivery rate set 1157.

21 If the particular Carrier/Service supports "Residential Delivery" services, the System adds  
22 the appropriate charge for the "Residential Delivery" service to each of the particular  
23 Carrier/Service's delivery rates 1189.

24 The System then determines whether the Shipper has requested a "Loss Protection" services  
25 1190. If so, the System accesses the Carrier Database (1404a through 1404n) to determine whether  
26 the particular Carrier/Service supports "Loss Protection" services 1191. If the particular  
27 Carrier/Service does not support "Loss Protection" services, then the particular Carrier/Service is  
28 eliminated from the delivery rate set 1177 and the System proceeds with the next Carrier/Service in  
29 the delivery rate set 1157.

30 If the particular Carrier/Service supports "Loss Protection" services, the System calculates  
31 the appropriate charge for the "Loss Protection" service and adds the appropriate charge to each of  
32 the particular Carrier/Service's delivery rates 1193 before proceeding with the next Carrier/Service  
33 in the delivery rate set 1157.

34 In the exemplary embodiments of the invention described here, the System automatically  
35 and dynamically regenerates the display of the Graphic Array and certain portions of other screens



1 when the Shipper makes online changes to Shipper input. To do this, the System generates  
2 executable code which it distributes with certain displayable frames to the Web Browser Client.  
3 This distribution of code for purposes of regenerating the Graphic Array differs from the initial  
4 generation of the Graphic Array as was described above. For example, in the embodiment of the  
5 invention depicted in FIGS. 39a through 39c, in the initial development of the Graphic Array, the  
6 System distributes the functions that initially generate the Graphic Array as follows: the Shipper  
7 entering shipping information 1150, displaying errors to the Shipper that insufficient shipping  
8 information has been provided and prompting the Shipper for additional information 1153, and  
9 displaying the Graphic Array 1160, are all processed by the Web Browser at the Client; all other  
10 functions and processes depicted in FIGS. 39a through 39c are performed by one or more of the  
11 System Servers.

12 Distribution to the Web Browser Client by the System of executable code that regenerates  
13 the Graphic Array provides the capability to dynamically reflect in the Graphic Array any changes  
14 that the Shipper may enter to the various Shipper Parcel Specifications; the Graphic Array  
15 immediately displays the new information without requiring the Shipper to request a recalculation,  
16 such as by clicking on a "Regenerate" button or the like.

17 To facilitate regeneration of the Graphic Array, the System generates executable code which  
18 it distributes with the frame, such as the frame that is displayed to the user for collecting the Parcel  
19 Specifications, to the Web Browser Client. A displayable frame is a set of information for display  
20 on the client display device. For example, in FIG. 36a, in one embodiment of the invention, a first  
21 frame of the screen depicted in FIG. 36a comprises the Title "Rates & Times" 1109a, the instruction  
22 "Click on the price to select a delivery date, time and carrier." 1109b, the legend "Date you expect  
23 to ship your package:" 1109c, the input field for the Expected Shipping Date 1060, the legend "I'll  
24 ship the package from:" 1109d and the input field for the Shipping Location 1066; a second frame  
25 of the screen depicted in FIG. 36a comprises the Graphic Array.

26 As the System generates the display of each frame, the System generates executable code  
27 which it distributes with, e.g., the Rate & Times frame, to the Web Browser Client. Thereafter, the  
28 Web Browser Client uses the executable code to automatically regenerate the display of the Graphic  
29 Array each time the Shipper makes changes to the Shipper Parcel Specifications. In one  
30 embodiment of the dynamic regeneration aspect of the invention, the executable code distributed to  
31 the Web Browser Client uses JavaScript.

32 In some cases, the executable code sent to the Web Browser Client provides the information  
33 and the capability to regenerate the Graphic Array without any further communication with the  
34 Server. In other cases, the Web Client Browser must return control to the Server so that the Server  
35 can access data maintained by or accessible by the Server; the Server then regenerates the Graphic

1 Array or otherwise provides the Web Browser Client with the information necessary to regenerate  
2 the Graphic Array.

3 In an exemplary embodiment of the automatic dynamic regeneration aspect of the invention,  
4 the executable code distributed to the Web Browser Client contains the logic to apply Carrier Rules  
5 to Shipper Parcel Specification changes. For instance, Shipper changes to certain Service Options,  
6 e.g., 550-552 as depicted in FIG. 37, would be automatically processed by the Web Client Browser  
7 and the Web Client Browser would regenerate the Single Day Rate Graphic Array depicted therein  
8 to reflect the Shipper changes. In one such automatic dynamic regeneration embodiment, only those  
9 functions that do not require further access to the relevant Carrier's database are distributed to the  
10 Web Browser Client.

11 It should be noted that, according to the automatic dynamic regeneration aspect of the  
12 invention, if after the Shipper views the Graphic Array the Shipper enters changes to any of the  
13 factors with which the System calculates the rates and develops the Graphic Array, the System uses  
14 a similar logic flow to regenerate the Graphic Array as was explained above in relation to FIGS. 39a  
15 through 39c.

16 The dynamic regeneration capability is used to automatically regenerate response screens in  
17 many places throughout the System. For instance, as was mentioned above, as in the case of FIG.  
18 36a, if the Shipper changes Origin Zip Code and/or Ship Location Type, the System will  
19 automatically regenerate a list of possible Drop Off Location choices.

20

## 21 C. TRACKING

### 22 1. Consumer Tracking

23 Once the Consumer has shipped a return package, the Consumer can track the shipment  
24 through the Merchant's online store. FIG. 40 depicts an Items Ordered Screen. By clicking on the  
25 Track your package link 405, the Consumer can track the package associated with the described  
26 item. FIG. 41 is a graphic representation of a Tracking Information Screen depicting status  
27 information about the tracked package.

28 FIGS. 42-45 depict an alternative Consumer Tracking embodiment in which clicking the  
29 Track your package link 405 as depicted in FIG. 42 generates a Track Your Package screen as  
30 depicted in FIG. 43. The Track Your Package Screen provides a window in which to collect a  
31 Tracking Number 601. As depicted in FIG. 44, the Consumer enters a Tracking Number 601 and  
32 clicks the onscreen Submit button 602 to track the package. Clicking the onscreen Close button 603  
33 closes the Track Your package screen. Clicking the submit button 602 generates the display of a  
34 Tracking Information Screen as depicted in FIG. 45. The Tracking Information Screen as depicted

1 in FIG. 45 provides a further Tracking Number collection window 601 and a Submit button 602 for  
2 tracking additional packages.

## 3 4 2. Merchant Tracking

5 Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant clicks the View Inbound Return Shipments 116, the  
6 Return System displays a View Inbound Return Shipments Screen, an exemplary embodiment of  
7 which is depicted in FIG. 46. As depicted in FIG. 46, the Inbound Return Shipments Screen  
8 provides the Merchant/User with the ability to select the Display format 620, the Date range for the  
9 report 622, and Sorting criteria 624. Each of the tracking criteria, 620, 622, and 624, provides a pull  
10 down menu button, e.g., 621, 623 and 625 respectively, with which the Merchant/User can view a  
11 pull down menu of choices. An exemplary menu for each of the choice types is depicted in FIG. 47  
12 and is discussed further below.

13 Continuing with FIG. 46, the Inbound Return Shipments Screen reports all inbound  
14 shipments that meet the Merchant/User's specified tracking criteria in the order specified by the  
15 Merchant/User. Each entry in the report identifies the person from whom the item is being returned  
16 627, the Service and Carrier with which the item is being shipped 628, the ship date 629, the  
17 delivered or expected delivery date 630, the destination 631, a Status 632, a Tracking number 633  
18 and a link with which the Merchant/User can view Details 640. The Merchant/User can refresh the  
19 Screen by clicking an onscreen Update View button 626.

20 FIG. 47 is a table representing exemplary menus for each of the tracking criteria. As  
21 depicted in FIG. 47, the Display format tracking criteria menu 620 provides the Merchant/User with  
22 the ability to request reporting of All Returns 620-1, or to limit the report to items that have the  
23 status of: Delivered 620-2, Exceptions 620-3, In-transit 620-4, or Return Requested 620-5.

24 The Expected Delivery Date criteria menu 622 provides for selections of Today 622-1, in 2  
25 days 622-2, in 3 days 622-3, in 4 days 622-4, in 5 days 622-5, in 6 days 622-6, in 7 days 622-7, this  
26 week 622-8, in the next 7 days 622-9, and in the next 14 days 622-10.

27 The Merchant/User can choose to sort the reported items 624, by Attention 624-1, Carrier  
28 624-2, Company 624-3, Service 624-4, Ship Date 624-5, and Status 624-6.

29 FIG. 48 is a graphic representation of a View Inbound Return Shipments Detail Screen. The  
30 Detail Screen reports Tracking Information 650, Return Information 660, and Original Order  
31 Information 670. The Merchant/User clicks the View Inbound Return Shipments link 680 to return  
32 to the View Inbound Return Shipments Screen.

33 Returning to FIG. 7, if the Merchant/User clicks the Reporting, Graphs, and Data Export  
34 link 117, the Return System displays a Reporting, Graphs and Data Export Generation Screen, an  
35 exemplary embodiment of which is depicted in FIG. 49. The Merchant/User can choose by clicking

1 on the appropriate keywords on the screen to report by SKU 700; status 701 (such as Requested  
2 701-1, in-transit 701-2, or delivered 701-3); Carrier 702; dollars 703 (item price 703-1, tax 703-2, or  
3 total 703-3); return reasons 704 (total count 704-1, or list all 704-2); return center 705 (online 705-1,  
4 or offline 705-2); paid by merchant 706; paid by customer 707; or customer ID 708.

5 The Merchant/User can define reporting time slices 709, such as, for example, a particular  
6 date 709-1, a date range 709-2, current day 709-3, last day 709-4, next day 709-5, current week 709-  
7 6, current month 709-7, a quarter 709-8, or a year 709-9. The time slices 709 described are  
8 illustrative and are not a limitation of the invention. Other time slices can be provided without  
9 departing from the spirit of the invention.

10 The Merchant/User can click on graph of reports 710 to display graphs of the returns that  
11 match the criteria selected. The Merchant/User can click on Export 711 to export a report to a file,  
12 other systems, etc.

13 FIG. 50 is a logic flow diagram that depicts the high level logic for tracking the status of a  
14 particular package. The Return System provides tracking of packages across multiple carriers. That  
15 is, each package may have been shipped with one of several supported carriers. Even so, the  
16 Returns System provides tracking of all packages shipped using the System.

17 As depicted in FIG. 50, the User enters 18a and 18b a tracking number 19. The System first  
18 validates 2050 the tracking number 19. The System performs the validation process by attempting  
19 to access the record on the System database 22 that is associated with the tracking number 19. To do  
20 this, the System requests that a System database server, e.g., 20a (as depicted in FIG. 3a) locate and  
21 retrieve the package record that is associated with the tracking number 19. The System database  
22 server, e.g., 20a, uses the entered tracking number 19 to search the System database 22 to locate and  
23 retrieve the specified package record. In one embodiment, the System database server, e.g., 20a, is  
24 programmed to perform database accesses using Sequel 7.0.

25 Through the validation process, the System determines whether the tracking number 19 is a  
26 System tracking number or a Carrier tracking number. Below are examples of Carrier tracking  
27 numbers.

28 UPS - 1Z8595610344113190

29 Airborne - 3918984344

30 FedEx - 811152682326

31 USPS - EJ585489546US

32 Yellow Freight - 2100003475

33 If a user enters a Carrier tracking number as the tracking number 19, then depending upon the status  
34 of the package, or the number of times that the package was tracked, there may be no information in

1 the System database 22 for the Carrier tracking number. In such a case, the System then uses  
2 algorithms provided by each Carrier to determine the Carrier identification.

3 If the System determines that there is information about the package on the System database  
4 22, then the System analyzes the Package Shipping State. If the Package Shipping State of the  
5 retrieved record is "Manifested" or "In Transit" and the Package Tracking State is not "Delivered",  
6 then the System prepares to track the package using the appropriate Carrier system. If the Package  
7 Shipping State of the retrieved record is "Delivered", or other final status, then the System reports  
8 the status of the package to the user.

9 If the tracking number 19 is a valid System tracking number, then the System extracts the  
10 Carrier's tracking number and Carrier's ID from the package record retrieved from the System  
11 database 22 before issuing a request 2054. Otherwise, if the tracking number 19 is a Carrier  
12 tracking number, then the System extracts the Carrier's ID from the package record before issuing a  
13 request 2052 to the Carrier's Internet system. The System uses the Carrier's ID to retrieve from the  
14 System database 22 the Internet URL for the Carrier's Internet web site. The URL information is  
15 configurable.

16 Returning for a moment to FIG. 3a, using the Carrier's Internet URL, the System then  
17 makes an HTTP connection to the Carrier's web server, e.g., 23-2 through 27-2, using the URL  
18 information for the particular Carrier's web server. Depending upon the Carrier, the System's 1  
19 request and report interface with the Carrier's web server is programmed in HyperText Markup  
20 Language ("HTML"), Extensible Markup Language ("XML"), both HTML and XML or other form  
21 as defined by the Carrier. FIG. 51 depicts an exemplary XML formatted request for submitting a  
22 tracking request to a Carrier. FIG. 52 depicts an exemplary successful tracking response, also in  
23 XML format, returned by the Carrier.

24 Then, as depicted in FIG. 50, the System transmits the Carrier's tracking number over the  
25 HTTP connection (2052 or 2054). The System instructs the Carrier's web server as to what  
26 information is requested based on the connection made using the URL.

27 If the Carrier's web server successfully responds 2055 to the System's 1 tracking request,  
28 the System disconnects from the Carrier's web server and parses the response data. Some Carriers'  
29 response data contains unnecessary text information. The System strips out all of the unnecessary  
30 text in order to parse the relevant information.

31 If the System database 22 does not have any previous record of the package, such as would  
32 be the case if the package had not been shipped using the System shipping application, then the  
33 System does not store any data about the package in the Package Table or the Package History  
34 Table.

1           Otherwise, the System then updates the System database 22 and reports the information to  
2           the User 2056. If the package is reported as delivered, the System populates the Package History  
3           Table 29 in the System database. As was previously mentioned, in an exemplary embodiment,  
4           Package History Table 29 (FIG. 3a) records contain the same data fields as described above  
5           regarding Package Table 28 (FIG. 3a) records.

6           If the Carrier's Internet web server returns an unsuccessful report, the System reports the  
7           failure to the User. If the Carrier's system successfully returns tracking information, then the System  
8           displays the package's current status.

9           In an alternative embodiment, if the tracking number 19 is a Carrier tracking number, the  
10          Server will validate the Carrier tracking number is a valid tracking number. If the Carrier tracking  
11          number is not a valid number, the Server will return an invalid tracking number error. If the Carrier  
12          tracking number is a valid number, the Server will not attempt to match the number to a manifested  
13          package; the Server will track the package using the particular Carrier's Internet tracking routine;  
14          and will return the tracking response to the Web Client of the requesting User.

15          In an alternative embodiment, if the tracking number 19 is a System tracking number, then  
16          the System validates the System tracking number to ensure that it is a valid System tracking number.  
17          If the System tracking number is not a valid tracking number, the Server will return an invalid  
18          tracking number error. If the System tracking number is a valid tracking number the Server queries  
19          the System database 22 to find the Carrier tracking number which corresponds to the System  
20          tracking number. If no package record is found for the System tracking number, then the Server  
21          will return an error to the Web Client of the requesting User. The error message will indicate that  
22          no package record was found; it will request the user to verify that the tracking number was from a  
23          package which had been dropped off notify the user that a package be tracked on the same day it  
24          shipped. If the package record is found and the actual ship date is the same as the current date, the  
25          Server will return an error to the Web Client of the requesting User indicating that the User cannot  
26          track the package on the same day it is shipped.

27          In this alternative embodiment, once the Server has identified the Carrier tracking number,  
28          the Server will track the package using the Carrier's Internet tracking routine. If the tracking  
29          response from the Carrier's Internet tracking routing indicates an error, the Server will make another  
30          attempt to track the package through the Carrier's Internet tracking routine. If the second tracking  
31          request results in an error, the Server will notify the Web Client of the requesting User that the  
32          Carrier is unable to track the package, and will log a tracking request error containing the Error Log  
33          number, the System tracking number, the Carrier tracking number, the time and date the tracking  
34          request occurred, the error response reported by the Carrier, and the Account Name of the User  
35          making the tracking request, if that information is available.

1 If, on the other hand, the Carrier returns a valid tracking response, the Server will update the  
2 package status in the Server Database with the tracking response and will return the detailed  
3 package information to the Web Client of the requesting User from the System Database as  
4 described below.

5 If the user supplied a Carrier tracking number, the Web Client will display the basic tracking  
6 information provided by the particular Carrier's Internet tracking function. In one embodiment of  
7 the invention, when the user provides a Carrier tracking number to track a package, the User's Web  
8 Client requires the User to identify the Carrier.

9 If the User provides a System tracking number, then if the User is logged on to the account,  
10 or otherwise enters valid logon information, that information must correspond to the Account which  
11 shipped the package. In that case, the User's Web Client will display the following information:  
12 System tracking number; recipient address; drop off location; Carrier and service; Carrier tracking  
13 number if available; actual ship date if available; delivery address if available; delivery location if  
14 available; delivery date if available; delivery time if available; signed for by information if  
15 available; package rate; package weight; package dimensions; packaging; customer reference  
16 information; all scan activity.

17 If on the other hand, the User is not logged on to the account, fails to enter valid logon  
18 information, or is logged on to an Account which does not correspond to the Account which shipped  
19 the package, the User's Web Client will display the following information: System tracking number;  
20 recipient contact name; recipient company name; Carrier and service; Carrier tracking number if  
21 available; actual ship date if available; delivery address if available; delivery location if available;  
22 delivery date if available; delivery time if available; signed for by information if available; package  
23 weight; customer reference information; all scan activity.

#### 24 D. RETURN MERCHANT SERVICES SYSTEM

25 The Return Merchant Service System (sometimes referred to herein as the "iReturn" system)  
26 component of the present invention provides a merchandise return computer system that is  
27 programmed to, among other things: receive from a second computer system a request to rate  
28 shipment of a particular package by a plurality of carriers; calculate a plurality of shipment rates for  
29 shipping a particular package in response to a request to rate shipment received from a second  
30 computer system; receive from a second computer system a request to process return shipment of a  
31 particular package by one of a plurality of carriers and generate a response to the second computer  
32 system comprising a status of the request; calculate a shipment rate for shipping a particular package  
33 in response to a request received from a second computer system to process return shipment of a  
34 particular package by one of a plurality of carriers; generate as a response to a second computer  
35

1 system a shipping label for shipping a particular package in response to a request received from the  
2 second computer system to prepare a shipping label for shipping a particular package by one of a  
3 plurality of carriers and send the shipping label response to the second computer system; generate as  
4 a response to a second computer system a merchandise return label for return shipping of a  
5 particular package in response to a request received from the second computer system to prepare a  
6 merchandise return label for return shipping a particular package by one of a plurality of carriers and  
7 send the merchandise return label response to the second computer system; designate as received a  
8 status of a particular return record in a database in response to a request received from a second  
9 computer system to identify as received a particular package, wherein the particular return record  
10 corresponds to the particular package; obtain in response to a request received from a second  
11 computer system to process return shipment of a particular package a shipping status for the  
12 particular package from a carrier computer system; store in a database a return record  
13 corresponding to a particular package in response to a request received from a second computer  
14 system to process return shipment of the particular package by one of a plurality of carriers;  
15 generate a request to rate shipment of a particular package by a plurality of carriers and digitally  
16 address the request through a global communications system to a second computer; generate a  
17 request to process return shipment of a particular package by one of a plurality of carriers and  
18 digitally address the request through a global communications system to a second computer;  
19 generate a request to prepare a return shipping label for shipping a particular package by one of a  
20 plurality of carriers and digitally address the request through a global communications system to a  
21 second computer; generate a request to prepare a merchandise return label for processing shipment  
22 of a particular package and digitally address the request through a global communications system to  
23 a second computer.

24

25 1. User and External System Interfaces.

26 FIG. 53 is a graphic representation of an overview of functional components of an  
27 exemplary embodiment of the present invention and certain interfaces between the functional  
28 components and entities external to the system. As depicted in FIG. 53, one of a plurality of  
29 Merchant systems, e.g., 4001, communicates with the iReturn Merchant Service System (which  
30 is sometimes referred to herein simply as the "System") 4000 either directly 4004, such as for  
31 the purpose of downloading data 4011 for the Merchant's account, or through Application  
32 Program Interface instructions 4005 that are communicated to the System 4000 through the  
33 Internet 4003.



1 Each Merchant's online Customers, e.g., 4007, view results of the particular Merchant's  
2 system's 4001 interface with the System 4000 on a display device, e.g., 4002, configured with  
3 the customer's computer, e.g., 4006.

4 Each of a plurality of Merchants, e.g., 4004, accesses various tracking and management  
5 reporting features of the System 4000, using a computer, e.g., 4008, configured with, among  
6 other things, a display device, e.g., 4009, connected to the Internet, e.g., 4003'. The tracking  
7 and management reporting features are available as selections through the System's 4000 Home  
8 Page. The System 4000 is sometimes referred to herein as "iReturn".

9 The System 4000 communicates through the Internet 4003' with a plurality of Carrier  
10 systems, e.g., 4010-1 through 4010-n to track shipment and delivery status of shipped parcels.

11 The System 4000 is provided through at least one Server. Servers are computer devices  
12 that are connected to the Internet through communication links. Each server computer may be  
13 dedicated to a particular function, such as performing database accesses. Alternatively, each  
14 server may perform multiple functions.

15  
16 2. Accounts Database.

17 The exemplary embodiment of the invention retrieves and uses information about each  
18 subscribing Merchant from an Account Database. Types of data captured and stored in an  
19 exemplary embodiment of the Account Database, and exemplary embodiments of user interface  
20 screens with which a subscribing Merchant inputs the Account Database information, are  
21 disclosed above. The information maintained at an Account level includes:

- 22 - User Id and password for use with each authorized API request.
- 23 - How often Returns records will be downloaded to this Account's computer
- 24 - Address (URL) where data downloads are to be sent.
- 25 - Web-page co-branding information
- 26 - Location of merchant's logo

27 The information maintained about a User of an Account includes:

- 28 - Identification of Returns records to which the User has access to for viewing or  
29 printing.
- 30 - Identification of Access class: Administrator class has access to all records for  
31 this Account; Customer Service class has access to all records for this Account;  
32 Warehouse class has access only to records bound for their warehouse  
33 -- A List of warehouses is maintained.

1                   --- For a district warehouse manager logon, several warehouses  
2                   may be listed.  
3               - Identifies which Custom Returns Reports this User logon has access to. For  
4               each report:  
5                   -- The Customer Returns Report ID  
6                   -- Points to a reporting procedure developed by Stamps.com Professional  
7               Services Group.  
8                   -- Parameters values for this report.  
9                   -- Any parameter value that the report requires that can be determined  
10               ahead of time for this account and user logon.  
11                  -- Is this a scheduled or ad hoc report.  
12                  -- For scheduled reports:  
13                      --- When the report is to be run  
14                      --- Identification of user/location to which the report is to be  
15               directed.

16  
17               3.     iReturn Database.

18               Continuing with FIG. 53, the System 4000 maintains data in an iReturn Database 4028  
19               for each parcel shipped using the System and Merchant information about each product or  
20               products that are returned in a shipped parcel. The System maintains in the iReturn Database  
21               4028, among other things, a Product Table 4030, Package Table 4032, and Package History  
22               Table 4029. The System updates the Package History Table 4029 by running an Automatic End  
23               of Day process 4031 that selects information from the Package Table 4032 and transfers that  
24               information to the Package History Tables 4029. Exemplary embodiments of types of  
25               information stored on the Product Table 4030, Package Table 4032, and Package History Tables  
26               4029 were disclosed above as being stored on the Product Table 30, Package Table 28 and  
27               Package History Table 29 as depicted in FIG. 3a.

28  
29               4.     iReturn Inbound Manager.

30               Continuing with FIG. 53, the System 4000 provides a web-based user interface,  
31               sometimes referred to herein as an "iReturn Inbound Manager" 4040, with which subscribing  
32               Merchants view tracking and management information and reports. The Merchant 4004

1 accesses an iReturn Home Page 4041 through a computer, e.g., 4008, with a display monitor,  
2 e.g., 4009, wherein the computer 4008 is connected to the Internet 4003'.

3 The iReturn Inbound Manager 4040 provides an iReturn Home Page 4041 which  
4 presents an iReturn Logon process 4042. If the Merchant successfully logs on, the iReturn  
5 Inbound Manager 4040 presents a Welcome Page 4043.

6 From the iReturn Home Page 4041, after having successfully logged on, the Merchant  
7 can select from a variety of Report Lists 4047. From the Report Lists 4047, the Merchant can  
8 view or print Reports 4048, according to the particular Merchant's authority to view particular  
9 types of reports.

10 From the iReturn Home Page 4041, after having successfully logged on, the Merchant  
11 can also interact with an iReturn Inbound Manager Monitor 4044. Using the iReturn Inbound  
12 Manager Monitor 4044, the Merchant can request Summary Tracking Information 4045. If a  
13 Merchant clicks on a particular parcel's tracking number displayed on Summary Tracking  
14 Information 4045, the iReturn Inbound Manager 4040 reports Detail Tracking information 4046  
15 for the clicked (selected) parcel(s).

16  
17 5. iReturn Merchant Service APIs.

18 Continuing with FIG. 53, iReturn Merchant Service Application Program Interfaces  
19 (APIs), 4020 through 4023, are provided on one or more API servers. iReturn Merchant  
20 Service Application Program Interfaces (APIs), 4500, 4020 through 4023, and 4050 are  
21 program interfaces that receive and process API requests comprising electronic objects of a  
22 particular type. Herein, reference to an API Server or to API Servers, refers to one or more  
23 server computers that are programmed to perform various activities comprising iReturn  
24 Merchant Service API functions, including but not limited to receiving and translating various  
25 types of API requests and composing and transmitting various types of API responses to the  
26 appropriate party's system.

27 In an exemplary embodiment of the invention, the iReturn Merchant Service APIs  
28 retrieve and process API requests in the form of XML (Extensible Markup Language)  
29 documents. XML is a markup language for electronic documents. A mark up language such as  
30 XML uses certain defined delimiters and tag names to designate meaning and/or organization of  
31 marked text within an electronic document.

32 The iReturn Merchant Service APIs, 4500, 4020 through 4023, and 4050, access the  
33 iReturn Database 4028 in response to received API requests, and prepare API responses

1 according to a set of rules specific to each API, and with information retrieved from the iReturn  
2 Database 4028. The iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 provides, for example, four APIs,  
3 each of which will be described in more detail below: Return Product 4020, Receive Product  
4 4021, Label Package 4023, and Price It 4022. The Label Package API 4023 processes requests  
5 to print shipping labels and in response to such requests, accesses a Location Database 4026 and  
6 the iReturn Database 4028 to obtain information with which to print shipping labels, e.g., USPS  
7 Return labels 4024, and UPS Return Labels 4025.

8 The iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 further provides a Track It API 4050 that  
9 issues tracking requests through the Internet 4003' to each of a plurality of Carrier Systems,  
10 e.g., 4010-1 through 4010-n. Each tracking request corresponds to a particular package that has  
11 been shipped using the System 4000. Exemplary embodiments of tracking features and tracking  
12 user interface features were disclosed above.

13 The iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 further provides an iReturn Account  
14 Activity Monitor 4033 that monitors, on a Merchant account level and other levels, API  
15 requests into and API responses out of the System 4000. The iReturn Account Activity Monitor  
16 produces Activity Reports and Summaries 4034 from the information that it collects.

17 FIG. 54 is a high level block diagram that provides an alternative view of the above  
18 described functional components of the iReturn Merchant Service System 4000. As depicted in  
19 FIG. 54, the iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 is comprised of the iReturn Database 4028,  
20 the Account Database 4027, the iReturn Inbound Manager 4040, and a plurality of APIs 4500,  
21 4020-4023, 4050.

## 22

### 23 6. Package Table.

24 In the Return Service System, the Package Table comprises, among other things, the  
25 following information: 1) Package Tracking State ID; 2) Package Shipping State ID; 3) Actual  
26 Delivery Time; 4) Delivered To information; 5) Shipping Date; 6) Carrier Tracking Number; 7)  
27 System Tracking Number; 8) Carrier ID; 9) Actual Package Weight; 10) Service Description;  
28 11) Package OID (also sometimes referred to as the Returns record key – an internally  
29 generated number; 12) Authorized – means the merchant has authorized this return. The record  
30 is active; 13) Received – means the merchant has received the product or products. The record  
31 is no longer active; 14) History – means the record (package and product) has been archived;  
32 15) Purged – means the record has been deleted (voided); 16) The following information is

1 repeated for every product returned in the package (The definition of each field is Merchant-  
2 specified and optional except as noted):

3 a) Merchant Cross Reference Number – this is the value that each Merchant’s system  
4 uses to reference the product or products in the particular package;

5 b) Product Code – typically the product SKU;

6 c) Product Category is a merchant specified grouping mechanism;

7 d) Reason code for the return is a code to indicate why that product is being returned  
8 - short description as to why the product is being returned

9 e) Merchant’s Return Merchandise Authorization (“RMA”) Number – is tied to each  
10 product. In one exemplary embodiment, when the merchant authorizes each  
11 individual item, each product has a corresponding RMA; otherwise, when the  
12 merchant authorizes an entire return, a single RMA number applies to the entire  
13 return;

14 f) Product Description;

15 g) Product Manufacturer;

16 h) Product Quantity;

17 i) Product Price;

18 j) Product Tax;

19 k) Product Refund amount;

20 l) Product Shipping Paid by (indicator or identifier);

21 m) Original Order number;

22 n) Original Order date;

23 o) Original Order status;

24 p) Original Order customer name;

25 q) Original Order customer identifier.

26  
27 7. iReturn Inbound Manager Monitor.

28 The iReturn Inbound Manager 4040 is a Web-based application hosted on one or more  
29 iReturn System servers. It provides Merchant personnel, for example, a Merchant’s Returns  
30 Administrator, Returns Manager, Warehouse Manager, Customer Service, and the like, with a  
31 tool with which to view, among other things, the products and product categories that have been  
32 returned, the reasons for returns, the return destinations, estimated return shipping arrival  
33 schedules, and return shipping status.

1           FIG. 55 is a high level block diagram that graphically depicts certain functional  
2 components of the iReturn Inbound Manager 4040. The block diagram pictured in FIG. 55  
3 depicts the functions available for selection by each Merchant from a main selection options  
4 page available to each Merchant. Authorization is provided by the iReturn Inbound Manager  
5 4040 at an Account level. When a Merchant logs on to the iReturn Inbound Manager 4040  
6 through an iReturn Logon Screen 4100, the Manager 4040 retrieves the Merchant's account  
7 information from the Account Database 4027 (as depicted in FIG. 53) and determines the  
8 particular Merchant's authorization to access the System and view reports.

9           The iReturn Inbound Monitor 4101 displays information concerning Returns for a  
10 particular Merchant that are Pending Shipment, as depicted in FIG. 56, or that are inbound, as  
11 depicted in FIG. 57. The iReturn Inbound Monitor 4101 provides user input fields with which it  
12 captures user input of display filters 4102. The iReturn Inbound Monitor 4101 further responds  
13 to user selection of display headings with which to sort Returns displays 4103. In response to a  
14 Merchant checking a selection mechanism for one or more particular display line items, the  
15 iReturn Inbound Monitor 4101 retrieves detail for each of the selected items from the iReturn  
16 Database and displays the detail onscreen.

17           The iReturn Inbound Manager Reports function 4105 provides standard Returns reports  
18 4106 that are available to all Merchants. The iReturn Inbound Manager Reports function 4105  
19 also provides custom Returns reports 4107 that are only available to Merchants that have been  
20 authorized to view them.

21           FIG. 56 is a graphic representation of an exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor 4101  
22 display of packages for a particular Merchant that are Pending 4111 shipment (sometimes  
23 referred to herein as the "Pending Log"). As depicted in FIG. 56, the exemplary iReturn  
24 Inbound Monitor display for Pending 4111 packages provides various display reporting filters.  
25 The display reporting filters include providing the Merchant with a Status selection 4110  
26 accompanied by a pull-down menu button 4123 that, when clicked, causes the onscreen display  
27 of a list of statuses in the Pending status category from which to choose, including: a.) Future;  
28 b.) Saved; c.) Prepared; and d.) "All". The Filter also displays "All" as a status selection. The  
29 Merchant can select one of the statuses in order to limit the displayed status items reported to  
30 only those items with the particular status or status category specified by the Merchant.

31           In the exemplary embodiment, each Pending status has a meaning as follows: a.) Future:  
32 label is printed for a particular package, but package will not be shipped until the following day  
33 or beyond; b.) Saved: incomplete information has been input for a particular package of group

1 of packages and no label has been printed; c.) Prepared: a shipping label has been printed for a  
2 particular package, the package is scheduled to be shipped by the end of the current date, but  
3 end of day processing has not yet been performed; and d.) All: reports all records regardless of  
4 status.

5 The exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor also provides the Merchant with an input  
6 selection field display reporting filter with which the Merchant can limit the displayed status  
7 items to a particular "Ship From" 4112 location or location category. If the Merchant enters  
8 text in the "Ship From" 4112 entry field, then the exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor will  
9 report all shipping records for which the Contact Name begins with the Merchant-specified text

10 The exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor also provides the Merchant with an input  
11 selection field display reporting filter with which the Merchant can limit the displayed status  
12 items to a particular "Delivery Date" 4113. The Delivery Date filter 4113 is accompanied by a  
13 pull-down menu button 4114 that, when clicked, causes the onscreen display of a list of  
14 Delivery Date choices and categories, including: a.) "All" (reports all packages); b.) Today  
15 (reports all packages with the current day's date); c.) Yesterday (reports all packages with a date  
16 preceding the current date by one day); d.) Last 2 days (reports all packages with either the  
17 current day's date or with a date preceding the current date by one day); e.) Last 3 days (reports  
18 all packages with either the current day's date or with a date preceding the current date by two  
19 days); f.) Last 4 days (reports all packages with either the current day's date or with a date  
20 preceding the current date by three days); g.) Last 5 days (reports all packages with either the  
21 current day's date or with a date preceding the current date by four days); h.) Last 6 days  
22 (reports all packages with either the current day's date or with a date preceding the current date  
23 by five days); i.) Last week (reports all packages with either the current day's date or with a date  
24 preceding the current date by six days); j.) Last two weeks (reports all packages with either the  
25 current day's date or with a date preceding the current date by thirteen days);; and k.) Last  
26 month (reports all packages with either the current day's date or with a date proceeding the  
27 current date by twenty-nine days). In the Pending display 4111, if the Merchant selects the  
28 Future status filter, then the Delivery Date drop down list button 4114 is inactive.

29 The exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor is programmed to display a "GO" button.  
30 When the "GO" button is clicked by a Merchant, the exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor is  
31 further programmed to select and report only those records that meet all of the criteria specified  
32 by the Merchant's display filter designations.

33 When an iReturn Inbound Monitor applies one or more Merchant-specified filters to a

1 display (also sometimes referred to herein as a “log”), then the iReturn Inbound Monitor is  
2 programmed to respond to a Merchant’s clicking of the “Next” 4132 or “Previous” 4131  
3 buttons by displaying the next or previous filter query results, as the case may be.

4 The exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor displays reported packages as a list on a  
5 display screen with the following headings: Status 4124; Ship From 4125; Tracking Number  
6 4126; Carrier/Service 4127; Destination 4128; Ship Date 4129; and Delivery Date 4130. The  
7 iReturn Inbound Monitor is programmed to respond to a single click on a particular heading by  
8 sorting all of the packages to be reported in ascending order according to the contents of the  
9 field corresponding to the clicked heading. The iReturn Inbound Monitor is further  
10 programmed to respond to a double click on a particular heading by sorting all of the packages  
11 to be reported in descending order according to the contents of the field corresponding to the  
12 clicked heading.

13 The exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor displays the following fields for each reported  
14 package: Package Status 4116; Ship From Contact Name 4117; System Tracking Number if  
15 available, or if not available, carrier tracking number 4118; Carrier/Service 4119; Destination  
16 4120; Ship Date 4121; and Delivery Date 4122.

17 FIG. 57 is a graphic representation of an exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor display of  
18 packages for a particular Merchant that are Inbound 4140 shipment (the “Inbound log”). The  
19 reporting features of the Inbound log are similar to reporting features of the Pending log with a  
20 few exceptions, which are further, explained below.

21 As depicted in FIG. 57, the exemplary iReturn Inbound Monitor Inbound 4140 display  
22 provides display reporting filters as were described above regarding FIG. 56. The iReturn  
23 Inbound Monitor Inbound log provides the Merchant with a Status selection 4110 accompanied  
24 by a pull-down menu button 4123 that, when clicked, causes the onscreen display of a list of  
25 statuses from the Inbound Status Category from which to choose, including: a.) Shipped; b.) In-  
26 Transit; c.) Delivered; d.) Received; e.) Exception; and f.) All. The Filter also displays “All” as  
27 a status selection. The Merchant can select one of the statuses in order to limit the displayed  
28 status items reported to only those items with the particular status or status category specified by  
29 the Merchant.

30 In the exemplary embodiment, each Inbound status has a meaning as follows: a.)  
31 Shipped; a shipping label has been printed, and end of day processing has been performed for  
32 the package; b.) In-Transit: the relevant carrier has picked up the particular package and scan  
33 data is available; c.) Delivered: the carrier has reported that the package has been delivered; d.)



1 Received: the destination point has reported physical receipt of the particular package; e.)  
2 Exception: the relevant carrier reports delivery problems for the particular package; and f.) All:  
3 reports all records, regardless of status.

4 As depicted in FIG. 57, the Inbound Log provides an input box, e.g. 4141, associated  
5 with each item package listed in the Inbound Log. A Merchant can click one or any number of  
6 input boxes, and then click a Function button, such as the Track Now button 4143, or the  
7 Received button 4144. If a Merchant clicks an input box for one or more particular packages,  
8 the iReturn Inbound Monitor marks the particular package as selected, as shown, e.g., for 4142.

9 If a Merchant clicks an input box for one or more particular packages, and then clicks  
10 the Received button 4144, the iReturn Inbound Monitor responds as depicted in FIG. 53 by  
11 updating the Return Status of the record corresponding to the package(s) selected to reflect a  
12 "Received" status, moves the package record from the Package Table 4032 to the Package  
13 History Table 4029, reflects the new status for the package in the Inbound Log, and records the  
14 Merchant user's identification as an override in the Returns record audit fields for the particular  
15 package.

16 If the Merchant has made a mistake in marking a particular package as Received, the  
17 Merchant can click the input box for the particular package(s), and then click the "Revert"  
18 button 4145. The iReturn Inbound Monitor will again update, as depicted in FIG. 53, the  
19 Return Status of the record corresponding to the package(s) selected to be Reverted to its  
20 previous status, moves the package record(s) from the Package History Table 4029 back to the  
21 Package Table 4032 (in one embodiment, this is only done after requiring the Merchant to first  
22 confirm the instruction to revert a particular package), reflect the reverted status for the package  
23 in the Inbound Log, and record the Merchant user's identification as an override in the Returns  
24 record audit fields for the particular package.

25 In one embodiment, the Pending Log also provides an input box. In such an  
26 embodiment, the Merchant user can request that the status of a Pending packages be updated to  
27 "Received." In such an embodiment, the Merchant user can also request Detail Tracking  
28 information about Pending packages as is described for Inbound packages with respect to FIG.  
29 58 below.

30 Continuing with FIG. 57, if a Merchant clicks an input box for one or more particular  
31 packages, the iReturn Inbound Monitor marks the particular package as selected, as shown, e.g.,  
32 for 4142. If the Merchant then clicks the "Track Now" button 4143, the iReturn Inbound  
33 Monitor is programmed to respond by reporting Detail Tracking information for each of the

1 selected packages. Detail tracking information is discussed below with regard to FIG. 58.

2 FIG. 58 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary Detail Tracking display for  
3 an exemplary Detail Tracking request in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As  
4 depicted in FIG. 58, the iReturn Inbound Monitor prepares and displays Detail Tracking  
5 information for a Merchant-selected package.

6 In one embodiment, Detailed Tracking information is collected on a periodic basis for all  
7 packages for which an API request has been received. In an alternative embodiment, the  
8 iReturn Inbound Manager also collects Detailed Tracking information for each package for  
9 which a Merchant clicks the "Track Now" button 4143 (FIG. 57). Tracking Information is  
10 obtained by the iReturn Inbound Monitor from Carrier systems as disclosed above.

11 The Detail Tracking information displayed as depicted in FIG. 58 includes: Origin  
12 location/address 4150, Destination location/address 4151, Package dimensions 506, Package  
13 weight 500, the number of Products Included 4161, the Carrier and Service 4119, Shipment  
14 Options, e.g., Loss Protection 516, Shipping Payment Type, e.g., Merchant's Carrier Account  
15 4160, Shipping Service Charges 4152, Shipping Option Charges 4153, Tracking report Status  
16 date and time 4162, Tracking Status 4116, Carrier 4119-1, Service 4119-2, SystemTracking  
17 Number 633, Carrier Tracking Number 450, Reference Number 4155, Ship Date 4121,  
18 Destination 4156, Expected Delivery Date 4122, Expected Delivery Time 4157, Name of  
19 Person who signed for delivery if status is Delivered 4158, Original Order Information 4163,  
20 and Information for each Product returned in the package, e.g., 4164-1 and 4164-2. The iReturn  
21 Inbound Monitor is scalable and provides for products 1 through n, where "n" is an unknown  
22 number. In one exemplary embodiment, "n" is limited to 20 products in a package. The  
23 limitation of one embodiment to 20 products per package is illustrative and is not a limitation of  
24 the invention.

25 Original Order information 4163 in the exemplary embodiment comprises, for example,  
26 Order Number 401, Order Date 407, Order Status 673, Customer Name 627, and Customer ID  
27 675. The Original Order information 4163 displayed in the exemplary embodiment of the  
28 Detail Tracking display is illustrative and is not a limitation of the invention. The invention  
29 provides for display of any Original Order information supplied to it by an API request or which  
30 can be obtained using information obtained from an API request as a key to access the Accounts  
31 Database or the iReturn Database or from a particular carrier system. If multiple products from  
32 a single Original Order are being returned in the same package, then the Original Order  
33 Information is displayed only once preceding all Product Information. If, on the other hand,

1 multiple products are being returned from multiple Original Orders, then the Original Order  
2 Information is displayed with the Product Information for each Product being returned.

3 Detailed Tracking Product Information for each product returned in the package  
4 displayed in the exemplary embodiment, comprises, for example: a Record Key 4159-1, an  
5 Authorization Number 662-1, a Product Category 662-1, an SKU 700-1, a product Description  
6 404a-1, the name of the Manufacturer 404b-1, the Quantity of the product being returned 404c-  
7 1, the Price 173-1, Tax charged on the original purchase 174-1, the Refund Amount 172-1, an  
8 identification of the party that pays for the shipping 707-1, e.g., the Customer, a Reason for the  
9 Return 427-1, and Customer Comments 425-1. The Product Information displayed in the  
10 exemplary embodiment of the Detail Tracking display is illustrative and is not a limitation of  
11 the invention. The invention provides for display of any Product information supplied to it by  
12 an API request or which can be obtained using information obtained from an API request as a  
13 key to access the Accounts Database or the iReturn Database or from a particular carrier system.

14 The Detail Tracking display provides an "Inbound Manager" tab 4170, that, when  
15 clicked, returns the Merchant to the main iReturn Inbound Manager option selection page. The  
16 Detail Tracking display also provides a "Back" button 4171 and a "Done" button 4172. If a  
17 Merchant clicks the Back button 4171, the iReturn Inbound Manager will return the Merchant to  
18 the immediately previous screen which the Merchant was viewing, such as, for example,  
19 another Detail Tracking display. If the Merchant clicks the Done button 4172, the iReturn  
20 Inbound Manager returns the Merchant to the iReturn Inbound Manager Tracking Log from  
21 which the Merchant entered the Detail Tracking display.

22 Returning to FIG. 55, in which a block diagram depicts the main selection options  
23 available to a Merchant, the iReturn Inbound Manager provides the Merchant with the  
24 opportunity to select Reports 4105.

25 As depicted in FIG. 55, the iReturn Inbound Manager Reports function 4105 provides  
26 standard Returns reports 4106 that are available to all Merchants. FIG. 59 is a graphic  
27 representation of a user interface screen that the iReturn Inbound Manager presents Merchants  
28 with which to request reports. As depicted in FIG. 59, the iReturn Inbound Manager provides  
29 the Merchant with a Report Type input field 4180 in which to specify whether the Merchant  
30 wants Standard or Custom reports. A drop down menu button 4181 is provided so that a  
31 Merchant can click the drop down menu button 4181 and cause the iReturn Inbound Manager to  
32 display a drop down menu of report types with which to input the information for the Report  
33 Type input field 4180.

1 As depicted in FIG. 59, depending on the Report Type 4180 input by the Merchant, the  
2 iReturn Inbound Manager displays for Merchant selection a list 4202 of the particular report  
3 categories from which the Merchant can select. In the exemplary embodiment, the iReturn  
4 Inbound Manager provides a selection of the following standard reports: Returns by SKU 4182,  
5 Returns by Product Category 4183, Expected Return Volume 4184, Return Reasons by SKU  
6 4185, No Scan 4186, and Late Delivery 4187.

7 The iReturn Inbound Manager provides for the customization by each Merchant of each  
8 of the Standard Reports through Merchant input of customization specifications as provided for  
9 by input fields 4188 – 4199. For each Standard Report, the Merchant can specify a Report Base  
10 4188, using a Report Base drop down menu button 4189 to cause a display of the available  
11 options (“Both” for both the Inbound and Pending logs; “Inbound”; and “Pending”).

12 For each Standard Report, the Merchant can specify a Report Style 4190, using a Report  
13 Style drop down menu button 4191 to cause a display of the available options (“Graph” or  
14 “Chart” for a graphical representation of the requested report; “Plain Text” requests a tabular or  
15 matrix form of the requested report.

16 For each Standard Report, the Merchant can specify a Date Range filter 4192, using a  
17 Date Range filter drop down menu button 4193 to cause a display of the available options,  
18 which in the exemplary embodiment include: Today (the current date on which the report is  
19 run), Current Week (with reference to the current date on which the report is run), Current  
20 Month (with reference to the current date on which the report is run), Current Quarter (with  
21 reference to the current date on which the report is run), First Quarter (January – March of the  
22 year in which the report is run), Second Quarter (April – June of the year in which the report is  
23 run), Third Quarter (July – September of the year in which the report is run), and Fourth Quarter  
24 (October – December of the year in which the report is run), Current Year (the year in which the  
25 report is run), Last 2 days, Last 3 days, Last 4 days, Last 5 days, Last 6 days, Last week, Last 2  
26 weeks, Next 2 days, Next 3 days, Next 4 days, Next 5 days, Next 6 days, Next week, and Next 2  
27 weeks.

28 For each Standard Report in Plain Text form, the Merchant can further customize the  
29 report using one or more of three sort keys 4194-4199. The sort keys available are the column  
30 headings of each report – that is, the sort keys are report specific. For example, if the Merchant  
31 selects the No Scan Report, then the available sort keys for each of the Primary 4194,  
32 Secondary 4196 and Third 4198 sort keys are: Tracking Number, Carrier/Service, Expected  
33 Ship Date, Customer ID, and Merchant Record Number. As another example, if the Merchant

1 selects the Late Delivery Report, then the available sort keys for each of the Primary 4194,  
2 Secondary 4196 and Third 4198 sort keys are: Tracking Number, Carrier/Service, Status,  
3 Expected Delivery Date, Customer ID, and Merchant Record Number. Because the sort keys  
4 are report specific, clicking the drop down menu buttons, 4195, 4197 and 4199, causes the  
5 display of different options depending on the selected Report Name 4202, and the selected  
6 Report Style 4190. If the Report Style selected is Chart or Graph, then the three available sort  
7 fields are inactive (“grayed out”).

8       Once the Merchant has made reporting and customization selections, the Merchant can  
9 click a Preview button 4200 which will cause the iReturn Inbound Monitor to prepare a display  
10 preview of the requested report. From the preview report screen, the Merchant can print using  
11 the browser Print icon or option. In an alternative embodiment, the Merchant can click a Print  
12 button on the Preview Report screen to print the displayed report. If the Merchant clicks the  
13 Cancel button 4201, the iReturn Inbound Monitor quits the Reports menu without showing any  
14 further data.

15       FIG. 60 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary “Returns by SKU” Report.  
16 A Merchant can use a “Returns by SKU” to spot a problem with a particular product. The  
17 example “Returns by SKU” report depicted in FIG. 60 has been customized to report Returns by  
18 SKU in Chart style for the Current Month. If the number of reportable returned SKU’s exceeds  
19 a given number “n”, for example, “10”, then in the exemplary embodiment, the Monitor reports  
20 the top “n” SKU’s returned during the requested time frame. The X-Axis 4301 of the  
21 exemplary “Returns by SKU” report identifies the various SKU’s reported; the Y-Axis 4302  
22 identifies a scale for the number of returns. Each bar in the bar chart format is color coded, a  
23 portion of each bar corresponding to a particular Destination – e.g., 4303-1 is in a color that  
24 corresponds to a legend entry 4303-2 for Warehouse 1; 4304-1 is in a color that corresponds to a  
25 legend entry 4304-2 for Warehouse 2; 4305-1 is in a color that corresponds to a legend entry  
26 4305-2 for Warehouse 3;

27       In one embodiment, the Merchant can group the Destinations in the Merchant’s  
28 organization in a logon setup procedure for all iReturns reporting. Alternatively, the Merchant  
29 can filter each report to select only certain of the Destinations for a particular report. Still  
30 further, the Merchant can choose to select “All Returns” rather than show any breakdown by  
31 Destination.

32       FIG. 61 is a graphic representation depicting an alternative exemplary “Returns by  
33 SKU” Report. Plain Text style reports provide totals for each SKU returned 4307, totals for all

SKU's returned 4308, and percentages of total of all SKU's Returned for each SKU returned 4309. The example "Returns by SKU" report depicted in FIG. 61 has been customized to report Returns by SKU in Plain Text style for the Current Month, sorted by "most frequently returned item".

FIG. 62 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary "Returns by Product Category" Report. A Merchant can use a "Returns by Product Category" report to spot a type of product experiencing high rates of returns. The example "Returns by Product Category" report depicted in FIG. 62 has been customized to report Returns by Product Category in Chart style for the Current Week. If the number of reportable returned Product Categories exceeds a given number "n", for example, "10", then in the exemplary embodiment, the Monitor reports the top "n" Product Categories returned during the requested time frame. The X-Axis 4310 of the exemplary "Returns by Product Category" report identifies the particular product categories for products returned; the Y-Axis 4311 identifies the number of products returned in each product category. The exemplary "Returns by Product Category" report depicted in FIG. 62 shows "All Returns" 4312 as opposed to a Destination breakdown.

FIG. 63 is a graphic representation depicting an alternative exemplary "Returns by Product Category" Report. PlainText style reports provide totals by product category 4313, totals of all product categories returned 4314, and percentages of each product category as compared to the total of all product categories returned 4315. The example "Returns by Product Category" report depicted in FIG. 63 has been customized to report Returns by Product Category in Plain Text style for the Current Week, sorted by the most frequently returned product category.

FIG. 64 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary "Expected Return Volumes" Report. A Merchant can use "Expected Return Volumes" to set labor levels to handle expected return volumes at each Destination. The exemplary "Expected Return Volumes" Report depicted in FIG. 64 has been customized to report Expected Return Volumes in Chart style for the next two weeks. The X-Axis 4320 identifies the days of the week; the Y-Axis 4321 identifies the number of returns expected. Each color-coded bar, e.g., 4324, 4325 on the exemplary "Expected Return Volumes" Report in Chart style depicts an individual Destination.

FIG. 65 is a graphic representation depicting an alternative exemplary "Expected Return Volume" Report. Plain Text style "Expected Return Volumes" reports provide totals for each Destination 4322, totals for all Destinations 4323, and in one embodiment, percentages of totals for each Destination as compared to the total for all Destinations (not shown). The alternative

1 exemplary "Expected Return Volume" Report has been customized to report in Plain Text style  
2 for the Next Two Weeks, and is sorted by date.

3 FIG. 66 is a graphic representation depicting an exemplary "Return Reasons" Report.  
4 The exemplary "Return Reasons" report depicted in FIG. 66 has been customized to report  
5 return reasons for the Current Quarter in a Pie Chart style. The iReturn Inbound Monitor  
6 Reporting assigns a color, e.g., 4330-1, to each reason given and provides a color legend that  
7 identifies the color as being associated with a particular reason description, e.g., 4330-2.

8 FIGS. 67a and 67b are graphic representations depicting alternative exemplary "Return  
9 Reasons" reports. FIG. 67a depicts a Return Reasons report that has been customized to report  
10 in Plain Text style only a single Product Category for the Current Quarter, and is sorted by most  
11 frequently returned reason. FIG. 67b depicts a Return Reasons report that has been customized  
12 to report in Plain Text style a second Product Category for the Current Quarter, and is sorted by  
13 most frequently returned reason. Plain Text style Return Reason reports provide totals for each  
14 reason 4331, totals for all return reasons (in the cases shown in FIGS. 67a and 67b, for return  
15 reasons for a particular product category) 4332, and percentages for each return reason of the  
16 total return reasons 4333.

17 FIG. 68 is a graphic representation that depicts an exemplary "Packages With No Scan"  
18 report that has been customized to report in Plain Text style, during the current week, and sorted  
19 by Expected Ship Date. A Merchant can use a "Packages With No Scan" report to identify  
20 packages that should have been shipped but for which no carrier scan information is available.  
21 Each package that should have been scanned is reported. For each package reported, the  
22 exemplary "Packages With No Scan" report shows the System tracking number 653, the Carrier  
23 and Service 4119, the Expected Ship Date 4121, the Customer Name 675, and the Merchant  
24 Reference Number 4155.

25 FIG. 69 is a graphic representation that depicts an exemplary "Late Packages" report  
26 that has been customized to report in Plain Text style, during the current week, and sorted by  
27 Expected Delivery Date. A Merchant can use a "Late Packages" report to identify packages  
28 that should have been received at a Merchant Destination but for which no receipt has yet been  
29 recognized in the System. For each package reported, the exemplary "Late Packages" report  
30 shows the System tracking number 653, the Carrier and Service 4119, the Expected Ship Date  
31 4121, the Status 4116, the Customer Name 675, and the Merchant Reference Number 4155.

1 As depicted in FIG. 55, the iReturn Inbound Manager Reports function 4105 also  
2 provides custom Returns reports 4107 that are only available to Merchants that have been  
3 authorized to view them.

4  
5 8. iReturn Merchant Service Application Program Interfaces ("API").

6 Before describing details concerning the content and format of API requests and  
7 responses, an overview of Customer interactions with a Merchant's system and concomitant  
8 API requests and responses between the Merchant's system and the iReturn Merchant Service  
9 Servers are provided. Also described below are Merchant interactions with the Merchant's  
10 system and concomitant interactions between the Merchant's system and the iReturn Merchant  
11 Service Servers.

12 FIG. 70 is a high level interactivity diagram depicting exemplary interactivity by a  
13 Customer with a Merchant's system and between the Merchant's system and the iReturn  
14 Merchant Service Servers in a situation where the Customer pays shipping charges in an  
15 exemplary embodiment of the invention. As depicted in FIG. 70, a Customer of a Merchant  
16 logs in 4400 to the Merchant's system 4001 and requests to see the Customer's order history. In  
17 response to the Customer's log in and request to see the Customer's order history, the  
18 Merchant's Order Processing System component 4001a of the Merchant's system 4001 displays  
19 to the Customer on a display device 4002 configured with the Customer's computer 4006 the  
20 Customer's order history 4401. The Customer's computer 4006 is further configured with a  
21 printer device 13, such as a laser printer.

22 Using the Returns System 4001b features disclosed above, the Customer identifies one  
23 or more items from the Customer's previous order that the Customer wants to return to the  
24 Merchant 4402.

25 In the embodiment of the invention depicted in FIG. 70, the Return Policy Engine 4001b  
26 of the Returns System is installed on the Merchant's System Servers 4001. As was described in  
27 the Returns Applications, the Merchant establishes a set of returns policy rules and preferences  
28 prior to Customer's using the Returns System, and the Returns System observes the Merchant's  
29 policy and preferences.

30 As depicted in FIG. 70, the Return Policy Engine 4001b responds to the Customer's  
31 request to return one or more items from a previous order by interactively displaying the  
32 Merchant's Return Policy and requesting that the Customer complete a Return Questionnaire  
33 composed by the Return Policy Engine 4001b according to the Merchant's previously



1 established Returns Policy and Preferences 4403. The Customer completes the questionnaire  
2 4404 which is provided to the Return Policy Engine 4001b. The Return Policy Engine 4001b  
3 evaluates the completed questionnaire according to the Merchant's Return Policy and  
4 Preferences. If the Merchant's Return Policy and Preferences require that the Customer pay for  
5 shipping a returned item, then the Return Policy Engine 4001b composes a message notifying  
6 the Customer that the Customer must pay for shipping an item to be returned 4405 and prepares  
7 and transmits to the iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 Servers 20a-20n and 21a-21z a  
8 Price It API request 4406 requesting rating for shipping the item to be returned. The structure  
9 and content of an exemplary Price It API request is similar to the Ship Package Request Node  
10 disclosed in detail below. As part of the information communicated by a Price It API request is  
11 Shipping and Package Specifications.

12 The iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 receives the Price It API request 4406 and  
13 uses the data contained in the request to develop shipping rates for each supported carrier and  
14 each service offered by each supported carrier. In one exemplary embodiment, the API request  
15 contains information about the particular Merchant's Returns Rules and Preferences; if the  
16 Merchant has indicated that only certain carriers and services be allowed for returns, then the  
17 iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 only prepares shipping rates for allowed carriers and  
18 services. In an alternative exemplary embodiment, the iReturn Merchant Service System 4000  
19 prepares shipping rates for all carriers and services; the Merchant's System 4001 receives the  
20 shipping rates and filters the rates displayed for the Customer according to the Merchant's  
21 Return Policy and Preferences. The iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 prepares a Price It  
22 API Response 4407 and sends it to the Merchant Return Policy Engine.

23 The way in which the Price It API 4022 (FIG. 53) of the iReturn Merchant Service  
24 System 4000 calculates shipping rates is similar to the shipping rate calculation described  
25 above. The System 4000 calculates a shipping rate for each carrier and for each service that  
26 supports shipping of the particular parcel and prepares a Price It API Response that contains the  
27 calculated shipping rates. The iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 returns the prepared Price  
28 It API Response to the Merchant's System 4001. In the exemplary embodiment, the Returns  
29 Policy Engine 4001b of the Merchant's system 4001 is programmed to display the shipping  
30 rates to the Customer in a way similar to that disclosed in FIG. 36a to the Returns Applications.

31 The Merchant's Return Policy Engine displays the appropriate shipping rates and  
32 shipping options to the Customer 4408. The Customer selects a particular shipping option that  
33 designates both carrier and service 4409 to the Merchant's Return Policy Engine 4001b. The

1 Merchant's Return Policy Engine 4001b uses the Customer-selected shipping option for a  
2 particular carrier and a particular service with which to prepare a Return It API request. The  
3 Merchant's Return Policy Engine 4001b communicates the Return It API request 4410 to the  
4 iReturn Merchant Service System 4000.

5 The iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 receives the Return It API request 4410.  
6 The Return It API request contains information similar to that described above with regard to  
7 the Price It API request. The iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 uses the information  
8 contained in the Return It API request to create a new Return Product record and adds the  
9 record to the Return Database 4028 (as depicted in FIG. 53).

10 The iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 then uses the information contained in the  
11 Return It API request to prepare a Return It API Response which contains labeling instructions  
12 4411 with which the Customer can print an appropriate type of label with which to facilitate the  
13 shipping of the item to be returned using the Customer-selected carrier and service; the iReturn  
14 Merchant Service System 4000 sends the Return It API Response to the Merchant's Return  
15 Policy Engine which in turn displays information provided in the Return It API Response to the  
16 customer 4412.

17 After printing the shipping label for the item to be returned, the Customer can request  
18 tracking information 4413. From the Customer's tracking request, the Merchant's System 4001  
19 prepares a Track It API Request 4414 which it sends to the iReturn Merchant Service System  
20 4000.

21 The iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 obtains tracking status information for the  
22 requested package from the appropriate carrier's system as was disclosed above. Once the  
23 iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 has obtained tracking status information for the  
24 requested package from the appropriate carrier's system, the iReturn Merchant Service System  
25 4000 prepares and communicates 4415 to the Merchant's System 4001a a Track It API  
26 Response. The Merchant's System 4001a reports the information contained in the Track It API  
27 Response to the Customer 4416.

28 Once the Merchant, such as one of the Merchant's Warehouses, has received the  
29 returned package, the Merchant acknowledges 4417 to the Merchant's System 4001a, which in  
30 turn acknowledges in the form of a Return Received API request 4418 to the iReturn Merchant  
31 Service System 4000, receipt of the returned package. In the exemplary embodiment depicted  
32 in FIG. 70, the iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 acknowledges receipt of the returned  
33 item 4419 at which point, the Merchant's System 4001a credits the Customer's Credit Card

1 Company 4421 account for the returned item (less the shipping charges) 4420. The Merchant's  
2 System 4001a then displays for the Customer a credit for the returned item less shipping charges  
3 4422.

4 FIG. 71 is a high level interactivity diagram depicting exemplary interactivity by a  
5 Customer with a Merchant's system and between the Merchant's system 4001 and the iReturn  
6 Merchant Service Servers 20a-20n and 21a-21z in the iReturn System 4000 in a situation where  
7 the Merchant pays shipping charges in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. The  
8 interactivity depicted in FIG. 71 is similar to that depicted in FIG. 70 except that because the  
9 Customer does not pay for shipping charges, the Merchant's system 4001 does not send the  
10 iReturn Merchant Service System 4000 Price It API Requests 4406 (FIG. 70) and the iReturn  
11 Merchant Service System 4000 does not send the Merchant's system 4001 Price It API  
12 Responses 4007. As depicted in FIG. 71, once the Merchant, such as one of the Merchant's  
13 Warehouses, has received the returned package, the Merchant acknowledges 4417 to the  
14 Merchant's System 4001a, which in turn acknowledges in the form of a Return Received API  
15 request 4418 to the iReturn Merchant Service System 4000, receipt of the returned package. In  
16 the exemplary embodiment depicted in FIG. 71, the iReturn Merchant Service System 4000  
17 acknowledges receipt of the returned item 4419 at which point, the Merchant's System 4001a  
18 credits the Customer's Credit Card Company 4421 account for the returned item 4420. The  
19 Merchant's System 4001a then displays for the Customer a credit for the returned item 4422.

20 FIG. 72 is a high level block diagram depicting some of the API functional components  
21 in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. Both API Requests and API Responses are  
22 sometimes referred to herein as API messages. In the exemplary embodiment, all API messages  
23 are XML formatted messages; all time values returned are in local time, and all API messages  
24 are sent and received using the secure Hypertext Transfer Protocol ("HTTPS") and Secure  
25 Sockets Layer ("SSL") for the encryption protocol.

26 As depicted in FIG. 72, there are three API functional components, including an Return  
27 Product API function 4020, a Receive Package API function 4021, and a Label Package API  
28 function 4023. The Return Product API function 4020 comprises a Return API Request  
29 function 4501, and a Return API Response function 4502. The Return API Response function  
30 4502 further provides a Return API Errors function 4503.

31 The Receive Package API function 4021 comprises a Receive API Request function  
32 4504 and a Receive API Response 4505. The Receive API Response function 4505 further  
33 provides a Receive API Errors function 4506.

1           The Label Package API function 4023 comprises a Label API Request function 4507  
2   and a Label API Response function 4508. The Label API Response function 4508 further  
3   provides a Label API Errors function 4509.

4           FIG. 73 is a high level structural diagram depicting the structural components of an API  
5   Request in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As depicted in FIG. 73, each API  
6   Request 4510 comprises a User Name 4511 associated with the Merchant's account, a Password  
7   4512, a Version Number 4513 that identifies the particular software version under which the  
8   API Request is generated, a Request Type 4514 (Return Product, Receive Product, or Label  
9   Product), and a Request Information Block 4530. The Request Information Block can comprise  
10   either, Ship Data 4515, Shipping Request Data 4516, Void Package Data 4517, Receive  
11   Package Data 4518, or Label Package Data 4519. In the exemplary embodiment, only one type,  
12   and only one instance of that type, of information block is allowed for each API Request.

13          FIG. 74 is a high level structural diagram depicting the structural components of an API  
14   Response in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As depicted in FIG. 74, each API  
15   Response 4520 comprises a Status 4521, a User Name 4511 associated with the Merchant's  
16   account, a Version Number 4513 that identifies the particular software version under which the  
17   API Response is generated, a Response Type 4522 (Return Product, Receive Product, or Label  
18   Product), and a Response Information Block 4531. The Response Information Block can  
19   comprise either, Ship Data 4515, Shipping Request Data 4516, Void Package Data 4517,  
20   Receive Package Data 4518, or Label Package Data 4519.

21          The Status 4521 will comprise a status indicator that identifies the status condition of the  
22   corresponding API Request and a Request Document Status Text that provides a brief  
23   description of the status condition if an error was encountered. If the API Request was  
24   successful, the Response status indicator will be set to zero (0). If there was an error, then the  
25   Response status indicator will be set the an error code that corresponds to the particular type of  
26   error encountered. If multiple errors were encountered, the iReturn system will set the status  
27   indicator to a single error code.

28          For each API Request, the iReturn System Servers, e.g., 20a-20n, 21a-21z, records: a  
29   date and time at which the Request was made; the account number for the Merchant's account  
30   making the request; the request type, the request version, the number of embedded requests,  
31   e.g., for a Receive Product Request, the number of received packages in the Receive Package  
32   Request; for each error status resulting from a non-business rule error, the error code, the error  
33   text, the date and time the error condition occurred.

1           There are two types of Returns API messages: a Ship Package type with which the  
2       iReturn System creates or updates a Returns record; and a Void Package type with which the  
3       iReturn System logically deletes a Returns record.

4  
5           a.       Ship Package Request Node.

6           The elements comprising a Ship Package Request Node in an exemplary embodiment of  
7       the invention are disclosed below:

8  
9               1.)   Transaction type.

10          Transaction type defines the type of package record to be created or updated. The  
11       transaction type support pre-processing (Traveler) and shipping API initiatives. A value for  
12       transaction type is required. A transaction type tag is at the node level. Therefore all of the  
13       records for a particular node must be of the same transaction type. Valid transaction types  
14       include: Returns; Pre-Processing; Shipping; and other types that are defined over time. Error  
15       Conditions that may be encountered include: "Transaction Type required" -- this error is  
16       returned if the Transaction Type is not provided; and "Invalid Value for Transaction Type" --  
17       this error is returned if the Transaction type provided is not a supported Transaction type.

18  
19               2.)   Returns Record Action Type.

20          The Action Type is at the node level. Therefore all of the records for a particular node  
21       must be of the same Action Type. An Action Type value is required. Valid types of Action  
22       Type values include: Create a Returns record; and Update a Returns record (the Update value  
23       implies first voiding an existing record, then creating new record). Rules governing each  
24       Action Type are described below. Error Conditions that may be encountered for Action Type:  
25       "Action Type required" -- this error is returned if no Action Type is provided; and "Invalid  
26       Value for Action Type" -- this error is returned if the Action Type provided is not a supported  
27       Action type.

28  
29               3.)   Number of Return Package Requests.

30          The Number of Return Package Requests is the number of separate Returns packages to  
31       follow. The value for this element is optional. If a value is not provided, the default value is  
32       "1".

1 Error Conditions that may be reported for this field include: "Invalid Value -  
2 ContentCount - [Value]" -- this error is reported if the Content Count value is not a valid value  
3 (the system will report the invalid value in the Error Text of the error message); "Number of  
4 Return Package Requests exceeds maximum" -- this error is returned if the number of Return  
5 Package Requests value exceeds a preset maximum value for the particular account, or for all  
6 accounts; "Invalid Request -- Number of Return Package Requests does not match number of  
7 blocks in the request document" -- this error is returned if the number of Return Package  
8 Request value does not match the actual number of individual Return Package Requests blocks.

9

10 4.) Return Package Block.

11 In the exemplary embodiment, the physical number of Return Package blocks must  
12 match the 'Number of Return Package Requests' value. In the exemplary embodiment, each  
13 Return Package Block comprises a Returns Record key, a Label type, a Label Image type, a  
14 Carrier Identifier, at least one (but may have many) Package Block, and each Package Block  
15 must have at least one (but may have many) Product Block. The elements comprising a Returns  
16 Record key, a Label type, a Label Image type, a Carrier Identifier, a Package Block, and a  
17 Product Block are disclosed below.

18

19 a.) Returns Record Key.

20 A Returns Record key should be set to null values if the Returns Action Type is equal to  
21 "create". Otherwise, if the Returns Action Type is set to "update", then the Returns Record Key  
22 must be a valid Returns Record Key for an existing record. Rules for processing different  
23 Action Types are disclosed below.

24 Error Conditions that may be encountered in processing a Returns Record Key include:  
25 "Returns Record key required" -- this error is returned if the Returns Record key is not  
26 provided; "Invalid Value -- Returns Record key" -- this error is returned if the Returns Record  
27 key is not NULL for Returns Action type = 'create' or if the Returns Record key is not a valid  
28 Returns Record key.

29

30 b.) Label Type.

31 Label Type is optional. Valid Label Types include: None (which means that no label is  
32 requested at this time); Shipping label (a shipping label for the specified carrier); Traveler label

(a Traveler label is provided to a person who desires to take the package to a retail shipping location. a description of a Traveler label is provided in more detail below); and Returns Label.

Error Conditions that may be encountered in processing Label Type include: "Label Type is Required" – this error is returned if the Label Type was not provided; "Invalid Value – Label Type – [Value]" – this error is returned if the Label Type value provided is not a valid Label Type value.

c.) Label Image Type.

If a shipping label is requested, a Label Image Type must be specified. Valid Label Image types include: "URL" – which refers to a link for display and print using the browser; and "Image" – which refers to return the actual image in \*.png format.

Error conditions that may be reported with respect to Label Image Type include: "Label Image Type is Required" – this error is returned if a shipping label has been requested but no Label Image Type has been provided; and "Invalid Value – Label Image Type - [Value]" – this error is returned if an invalid Label Image Type has been provided (the System will report the invalid value in the Error Message Text).

d.) Carrier Identifier.

A Carrier Identifier ("ID") is required if the Label Type specified is equal to Shipping or Returns. Valid Carrier Identifiers are linked to Label Types. If the Label Type is equal to Returns, then the Label format will be either USPS return label format or UPS ARS label format.

Error Conditions that may be reported with respect to Carrier Identifier include: "Carrier ID Required" – this error is reported if the Label Type is specified to be Shipping or Returns and no Carrier ID has been provided; "Invalid Value – Carrier ID for this Label Type - [Carrier Id value, Label type value]" -- this error is reported if the Carrier ID provided is not supported or is not supported for the requested Label Type value provided (the system will report the invalid Carrier ID values and Label type values in the Error message text).

e.) Package Information Block.

1 In the exemplary embodiment, all of the information that is stored for any package is  
2 provided. There must be at least one Package information block per Return Package Block.  
3 There may be many Package information blocks per Return Package Block. In the exemplary  
4 embodiment, Package\_OID is not passed in the API request document, but rather is calculated  
5 by the iReturn system.

6  
7 f.) Billing Information.

8 In the exemplary embodiment, the iReturn system supports only pre-paid shipping  
9 (billing type=1). Billing type is required. In one embodiment, billing type=1 is not required,  
10 and if it is not pre-paid, then the iReturns System is retrieved from the Accounts database from  
11 the account associated with the particular Merchant making the API request. In the exemplary  
12 embodiment, Carrier Account is an optional field, and if specified, instructs the system to bill a  
13 particular carrier account for the shipping.

14  
15 g.) ShipFrom Information.

16 ShipFrom Information comprises: CompanyName, ContactName, EmailAddress,  
17 Address, City, State, Zip, Country Phone numbers (Fax numbers, business numbers), and Error  
18 Conditions. The CompanyName is option. It is normally not provided. If it is not provided, or  
19 is blank or null, the Contact Name is used. ContactName requires a value and represents the  
20 Merchant's customer returning the product. EmailAddress is optional. Address – a value is  
21 required. City value is required. State value is required based on associated Country rules. Zip  
22 value is required based on associated Country rules. Country value is optional; the default  
23 country value is the United States. International origin is not supported in the exemplary  
24 embodiment. Phone number values are optional. An error condition for each of these elements  
25 will be reported if the value provided is not a valid value for the element, or if it is a required  
26 element, if no value is provided.

27  
28 h.) ShipTo Information.

29 Account Information is obtained from the logon account and password. This account  
30 information is used to tie a package to a company and a physical location. ShipTo Information  
31 includes: CompanyName (Optional); ContactName (Required); EmailAddress (Optional);  
32 Address (Required); City, State, Zip, and Country (Required); Address type (Required); Phone  
33 numbers: Fax, Business (Optional ).



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i.) Site Information.

Site Information includes: AccountNumber, CompanyName, ContactName, EmailAddress, Address, City, State, Zip, and Country, Phone numbers: Fax, Business, and Site type(required). In the exemplary embodiment, only site type=5 (scheduled pickup) is supported.

j.) Package Information.

Package Information includes: AccountNo; AlternateAccountNumber; UserId; CustomerId; Package DateTime Information (Required Date format YYYY-MM-DD; Required Time format HH:MM); DropOffDate (optional; if the default value is not passed, the expected drop off date is the Dropoff\_delay plus the package record create date); ActualDeliveryDateTime (this is not provided but rather is calculated by the system - either the tracked delivery datetime or the received datetime); EarliestDeliveryTime (optional; default value is 17:00 (5 pm)); ExpectedDeliveryDate (Not provided but rather is calculated by the system -- this is the DropOffDate plus the transit time (in days)); LatestDeliveryDateTime (Not passed; calculated by the system).

k.) Package TypeDimensionsWeight Information.

Package TypeDimensionsWeight Information includes: Package Type (required); Length (required if Package Type is equal to "other"; ignored otherwise); Height (required if Package Type is equal to "other"; ignored otherwise); Width (required if Package Type is equal to "other"; ignored otherwise); Weight (required). Various error conditions are reported if required elements are missing, or if an element value is provided that is not supported.

Error conditions reported include:

"Weight Required" – this error is returned if the Weight is not provided;

"Invalid Value - Weight - [Invalid]" – (the system reports the invalid weight value in the Error Message Text) this error is reported if the Weight is not a valid Weight value);

1           “Weight Too Large - [*Weight*]” – (the system reports the Weight value in the Error  
2 Message Text) this error is returned if the Weight exceeds the maximum Weight value for the  
3 selected Carrier;  
4

5           “Weight Too Small - [*Weight*]” – the system reports the Weight value in the Error  
6 Message Text) this error is returned if the Weight does not meet the minimum Weight value for  
7 the selected Carrier;  
8

9           “Dimensional Weight Too Large - [*Length, Height, Width ,DimWeight*]” – (the system  
10 will report the Length, Height, Width, and Dimensional Weight in the Error Message Text) this  
11 error is returned if the calculated Dimensional Weight exceeds the maximum Weight value for  
12 the selected Carrier and Service;  
13

14           “Invalid Value - Packaging Type - [*Invalid*]” – (the system will report the invalid value  
15 in the Error Message Text) this error is returned if the Packaging Type is not a supported type;  
16

17           “Invalid Value - Package Length - [*Invalid*]” – (the system will report the invalid value  
18 in the Error Message Text) this error is returned if the Package Length is not a valid value;  
19

20           “Invalid Value - Package Height - [*Invalid*]” – the system will report the invalid value in  
21 the Error MessageText) this error is returned if the Package Height not a valid value;  
22

23           “Invalid Value - Package Width - [*Invalid*]” –(the system will report the invalid value in  
24 the Error Message Text) this error is returned if the Package Width is not a valid value;  
25

26           “Invalid Value - Additional Handling - [*Invalid*]” – (the system will report the invalid  
27 value in the Error MessageText) this error is returned if the Additional Handling value is not a  
28 valid;  
29

30           “Package Length Required” –this error is returned if the Packaging Type is "Other" and  
31 if the Package Length is not provided;  
32

“Package Height Required” – this error is returned if the Packaging Type is "Other" and if the Package Height is not provided;

“Package Width Required” – this error is returned if the Packaging Type is "Other" and if the Package Width is not provided;

“Length Too Large - [*Length*]” – the system will report the Package Length in the Error Message Text) this error is returned if the Packaging Type is "Other" and if the maximum Package Length for selected Carrier is exceeded;

“Length plus Girth Too Large - [*Length, Girth*]” – the system will report the Length and Girth in the Error Message Text) this error is returned if the Packaging Type is "Other" and if the maximum Length plus Girth for selected Carrier is exceeded;

“Package Too Small - [*Length, Height, Width*]” – the system will report the Length, Height, Width in the Error Message Text) this error is returned if the Packaging Type is "Other" and if the minimum package dimensions for selected Carrier are not met.

1.) Carrier Information.

Carrier Information includes: CarrierAccount (required); CarrierId or CarrierName (required; Valid Carrier ids are linked to Label type; for Label type = Returns: USPS return label format and UPS ARS label format are valid); CarrierServiceId or CarrierServiceName (required). Error Conditions reported with respect to Carrier Information include: “Carrier Required” -- this error is returned if a Carrier is not provided; “Carrier Account Number Required” -- this error is returned if a Carrier Account is not provided; “Carrier Service Required” -- this error is returned if a Carrier Service is not provided; “Invalid Value - Carrier - [Carrier]” -- (the system will report the invalid value in the Error Text) this error is returned if the Carrier is not a supported carrier; “Invalid Value – Carrier Account - [Carrier Account]” -- (the system will report the invalid value in the Error Text) this error is returned if the Carrier Account is not a valid Carrier Account; “Invalid Value - Service - [Service]” -- (the system will report the invalid value in the Error Text) this error is returned if the Service is not a valid for the selected carrier.

m.) Service Options and Other Flags.

All values for Service Options and other flags are optional. Service Options and other flags include: CallTag; CertifiedMail; ReturnReceipt; "Tracking Required" is an option of Return Receipt; COD; DeclaredValue; Value of Commodity; DeliveryConfirmation (Tracking Required; Signature Required); VerbalConfirmationofDelivery (this option is only valid for UPS); ProofofDelivery ("Signature Required" is an option of ProofofDelivery); DeliveryNoteEmail; GuaranteedDelivery; AllowSaturdayDelivery; AllowSundayDelivery. Error Conditions that may be reported with respect to Service Options and Other Flags include:

"Invalid Value – Delivery Confirmation - [*Value*]"

The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

Error returned if Delivery Confirmation value is not a valid value.

"Invalid Value - Verbal Confirmation of Delivery - [*Value*]"

The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

Error returned if Verbal Confirmation of Delivery value is not a valid value.

"Invalid Value - Call Tag - [*Value*]"

The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

Error returned if Call Tag value is not a valid value.

"Invalid Value - Certified Mail - [*Value*]"

The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

Error returned if Certified Mail value is not a valid value.

"Invalid Value - Return Receipt - [*Value*]"

The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

Error returned if Return Receipt value is not a valid value.

"Invalid Value - Declared Value Amount – - [*Value*]"

The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

Error returned if Declared Value Amount is not a valid value.

1  
2 “Invalid Value - COD Amount – [Value]”

3 The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

4 Error returned if COD Amount is not a valid value.

5  
6 “Invalid Value - Allow Saturday Delivery - [Value]”

7 The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

8 Error returned if Allow Saturday Delivery value is not a valid value.

9  
10 “Invalid Value - Proof of Delivery - [Value]”

11 The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

12 Error returned if Proof of Delivery value is not a valid value.

13  
14 “Invalid Value - Verbal Confirmation of Delivery - [Value]”

15 The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

16 Error returned if Verbal Confirmation of Delivery value is not a valid  
17 value.

18  
19 “Service Option Conflict - [Service Option1, Service Option2]”

20 The system will report the two conflicting service option values in the  
21 Error Text:

22 Error returned if an indicated Service Option is not valid with another  
23 indicated

24 Service Option for the selected Carrier.

25  
26 “Invalid Value - Allow Sunday Delivery - [Value]”

27 The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

28 Error returned if Allow Sunday Delivery value is not a valid value.

29  
30 n.) Product Information Block.

31 The Product Information Block contains all of the information that the Merchant keeps  
32 about the product(s) being returned. There must be at least one Product Information Block in a  
33 Ship Package Request Node. All product information is optional except for the Merchant

product key. All product information is alphanumeric text string. Product Information Block data includes: Merchant cross-reference key (Must be unique); Authorization Number; Category; SKU; Description; Manufacturer; Quantity; Price; Tax; Refund; Shipping Paid by; Order Number; Order Date; Order Status; Customer Name; Customer ID; Return Reason code; Return Reason description.

Error Conditions reported include: "Merchant product key Required" -- this error is returned if Merchant Product key is not provided.

b. Ship Package Block Action Type Rules.

1.) Create Rules.

There are rules for creating new Return Records. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, these rules require that if any error conditions were reported for a Return API Request, that no new Returns record be created.

In order to create a new Returns record, each Returns record key must be unique. In one exemplary embodiment, Pre-processing transaction records are treated the same as Returns transaction records.

2.) Update Rules.

There are also rules for updating existing records. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, if there are error conditions, the system will not update a Returns record.

In order to update an existing Returns record, the Returns Record key in the API Request must be valid. Updates to any Package Block data must follow all package object rules and behaviors. The Package is voided in the Package\_History table, and then a new Package is created in the Package\_History table.

If Package is not in Package\_History, then void Package in the Package table and create a new Package in the Package table.

A Merchant can only update records associated with their iReturn System account. A voided package may not be updated. Nor can updates be applied to a record that has been logically closed

3.) Delete and Void Rules.

1           There are also rules for deleting existing records. In the exemplary embodiment of the  
2 invention, if there are error conditions, the system will not delete a Returns record.

3           In order to delete an existing Returns record, the Returns Record key must be valid.  
4 When a Returns record is deleted, it is not physically deleted, but is only logically deleted – that  
5 is, the package is voided.

6           Deleting a Returns record must follow all package object rules and behaviors. A  
7 Merchant can only delete records associated with their Stamps account. A Returns record in  
8 Package\_History can not be deleted.

9           For a package in the Package\_History table, that has not been physically received, the  
10 receipt of a Void It™ API request document instructs the API to update the status of the  
11 package to 'EXPIRE'.

12           A package that has been voided can not be deleted. For a package in the  
13 Package\_History table, that has been physically received, the receipt of a Void It™ API request  
14 document instructs the API to update the status of the package to 'COMPLETE'.

15  
16  
17                           4.)    Action Error Conditions.

18           Various Error Conditions may be reported when the system attempts to apply a  
19 particular action, including:

20  
21                    "Invalid Value – Returns Record Key - [Value]"

22                           The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

23                           Error returned if Returns Record Key value is not a valid value.

24  
25                    "Invalid Value – Can not update Returns Record for another merchant - [Value]"

26                           The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

27                           Error returned if Returns Record Key value is for a record other than  
28 merchant's.

29  
30                    "Invalid Value – Can not update Returns Record that has been physically  
31 received - [Value]"

32                           The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

33                           Error returned if Returns Record Key value is for an update of a record

that has been physically received.

“Invalid Value – Can not void Returns Record that has been voided - [Value]”

The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

Error returned if Returns Record Key value is for a void of a record that has been voided.

“Invalid Value – Can not void Returns Record that has been shipped - [Value]”

The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

Error returned if Returns Record Key value is for a void of a record that is in Package\_History table.

c. Ship Package Response Node.

The Ship Package Response Node includes the following elements:

Echo of Origin, Destination, Weight request elements for each received package;

System Returns record key for each package;

Package OID for each package;

System Tracking number for each package;

Echo of Label if so requested.

d. Void Package Request Node.

In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, a Void Package Request Node comprises: a. Number of Void Package Requests; and a corresponding number of Void Package Blocks.

The Number of Void Package Requests is the number of separate Void Package packages to follow. This is Optional. If a value is not provided, the default value is “1”.

Error Conditions that may be reported include:

“Invalid Value - ContentCount - [Value]”

The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

Error returned if the Content Count value is not valid value.



1           “Invalid Request – Number of Void Package Requests does not match number of  
2           blocks in the request document”

3                   This error is returned if the number of Void Package Request value  
4                   does not match the actual number of individual Return Package  
5                   Requests blocks.

6  
7           A Void Package Block comprises a Returns Record key. As mentioned above, the  
8           physical number of Void Package blocks must match the ‘Number of Void Package Requests’  
9           value.

10           The Returns Record key is also known as the Package OID. This is Required.  
11           Error Conditions that may be reported include:

12  
13                   “Returns Record key required”

14                   This error is returned if the Returns Record key is not provided.

15  
16                   “Invalid Value – Returns Record key”

17                   This error is returned if the Returns Record key is not a valid Returns  
18                   Record key.

19  
20           e.     Void Package Rules.

21           If a package to be voided is in the Package Table, follow normal void package logic.  
22           Otherwise, if the package to be voided is in the Package\_History Table, if the package status is  
23           not equal receive: if the package carrier is USPS, then update status to expire; otherwise, if the  
24           package carrier is not USPS, then report as an error. If the package to be voided is in The  
25           Package\_History Table, but the status is equal received, then update status to complete.

26  
27           f.     Void Package Response Node.

28           The Return Product Response Node echoes the Void Package Request Node elements.

29  
30           g.     Receive Package Request Node.

31           In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, a Receive Package Request Node  
32           includes the following elements: Number of Receive Package Requests; one or more Receive  
33           Package Request blocks. The Number of Receive Package Requests indicates the number of

1 separate Receive packages to follow. The element is Optional. If a value is not provided, the  
2 default value is "1".

3 Error Conditions that may be reported with respect to Number of Receive Package  
4 Requests include:

5  
6 "Invalid Value - ContentCount - [Value]"

7 The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

8 Error returned if the Content Count value is not valid value.

9  
10 "Number of Receive Package Requests exceeds maximum"

11 This error is returned if the number of Receive Package Requests value  
12 exceeds the maximum value for this account.

13  
14 "Invalid Request – Number of Receive Package Requests does not match number  
15 of blocks in the request document."

16 This error is returned if the number of Receive Package Request value  
17 does not match the actual number of individual Receive  
18 Package Requests blocks.

19  
20 Each Receive Package Request block includes the following: Package OID (required);  
21 date package was received; and time package was received.

22 Based on the Package OID, check to determine if the Package is in Package\_History. If  
23 the package is not in Package\_History: Force Package into the Package\_History table; and Flag  
24 Package as forced. The package must not have been previously physically received.

25 Error Conditions that may be reported include:

26  
27 "Package OID is required"

28 Error returned if Package OID value is not provided.

29  
30 "Package has already been received"

31 Error returned if package has already been physically received.

32  
33 "Invalid Value – Package OID - [Value]"

1                   The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

2                   Error returned if Package OID value is not a valid value.

3

4           The date that the package was received is required. In the exemplary embodiment of the  
5 invention, dates are provided in the following date format: "YYYY-MM-DD".

6           Error Conditions that may be reported include:

7

8                   "Date Package was received is required"

9                   Error returned if received data value is not provided.

10

11                   "Invalid Value – Received Date - [Value]"

12                   The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

13                   Error returned if received date value is not a valid value.

14

15           The time that the package was received is required. In the exemplary embodiment of the  
16 invention, time is provided in the following time format: "HH:MM".

17           Error Conditions that may be reported include:

18

19                   "Time Package was received is required"

20                   Error returned if received time value is not provided.

21

22                   "Invalid Value – Received Time - [Value]"

23                   The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

24                   Error returned if received time value is not a valid value.

25

26

27           h.     Receive Package Response Node.

28           The Receive Package Response information block echo the Receive Package Request  
29 elements.

30

31           i.     Label Package Request Node.

32           In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, very little data is passed in a Label

33 Package Request API because the assumption is that a Returns record with all of the necessary

1 information already exists. A Label Package Request Node includes the following elements: a  
2 Number of Label Package Requests; and one or more Label Package Request blocks.

3 A Number of Label Package Requests specifies the number of separate Label package  
4 requests to follow. This element is Optional. The maximum allowed value is a configurable  
5 item for each Merchant account. If a value is not provided, the default value is "1". Error  
6 Conditions that may be reported include:

7

8 "Invalid Value - ContentCount - [*Value*]"

9 The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

10 Error returned if the Content Count value is not valid value.

11 "Invalid Request – Number of Label Package Requests does not match number  
12 of blocks

13 in the request document"

14 This error is returned if the number of Label Package Request value does  
15 not match

16 the actual number of individual Label Package Requests blocks.

17

18 In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, each Label Package Request block will  
19 include the following elements: Label Type, Label Image Type, Carrier ID, and Package OID.

20 Label Type is required. Valid Label types include: Shipping label; Traveler Label; and  
21 Returns label. Error Conditions that may be reported include:

22

23 "Label type is required."

24 Error returned if label type is not provided.

25

26 "Invalid Value – Label type - [*Value*]"

27 The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

28 Error returned if label type value is not a valid value.

29

30 Label Image type is required. Valid Label Image types include: URL – link for display  
31 and print using the browser; Image – return the actual image in \*.png format. Error Conditions  
32 that may be reported include:

33 "Label Image type is required"

1 Error returned if label image type is not provided.

2

3 "Invalid Value – Label Image type - [*Value*]"

4 The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

5 Error returned if label image type value is not a valid value.

6

7 In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, Carrier ID is Required. Valid Carrier  
8 IDs are linked to Label type. For Label type = Returns: USPS return label format and UPS ARS  
9 label format are available. Error Conditions that may be reported include:

10

11 "Carrier Id is required"

12 Error returned if carrier id is not provided.

13

14 "Invalid Value – Carrier Id for this Label type - [*Carrier Id value, Label type*  
15 *value*]"

16 The system will report the invalid values in the Error Text.

17 Error returned if carrier id is not supported for the requested label type

18 value

19

20 In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, Package OID is required. The value must  
21 be a valid Package OID. Error Conditions that may be reported include:

22

23 "Record key is required"

24 Error returned if record key is not provided.

25

26 "Invalid Value – Record key - [*Value*]"

27 The system will report the invalid value in the Error Text.

28 Error returned if record key value is not a valid value.

29

30 j. Label Package Process.

31 Based upon the Label Type in the relevant API Request, the iReturn System will prepare  
32 the following relevant type of label for the specified carrier and service:

33

1                           1.)    Print a USPS label.

2           If the carrier is USPS, the iReturn System creates a USPS Electronic Merchandise  
3 Return (EMR) label as depicted in FIG. 75a. To do that, the iReturn System generates the  
4 EMR in PNG format on a system server.

5           The iReturn System formats, and causes to be printed, a bar code representing the  
6 system tracking number for placement on an 8 ½" x 11" sheet of paper on which a user  
7 Customer will print the EMR. The bar code for the system tracking number would allow  
8 warehouse personnel to match physically received packages with information in the returns  
9 record database. The presence of the bar code on the label also facilitates recognition by  
10 warehouse personnel of a received package for identification to the system during the Receive  
11 Package API process.

12          The iReturn System also formats and causes to be printed a location of a retail shipping  
13 center, such as, for example, a Mail Boxes Etc., nearest to the customer's location. As part of  
14 the label, in one embodiment, the iReturn System also prints a record number so that the retail  
15 shipping center can access the iReturn System to view the record for the package. In one  
16 exemplary embodiment, the iReturn System also prints the location of the nearest retail store of  
17 the Merchant's.

18          The iReturn System causes the display of instructions to print the EMR using a laser  
19 printer, the appropriate way to tape the label on to the package, and to take the package to the  
20 Post Office or retail shipping center. Below the fold of the label, the iReturn System inserts a  
21 URL link back to the Merchant's website. Exemplary instructions are identified in FIG. 75b.

22

23                           2.)    Print a UPS label

24          If the carrier is UPS, the iReturn System creates a UPS Authorized Return Service  
25 (ARS) label (not shown). To do that, the iReturn System generates the ARS in PNG format on  
26 a system server. In the exemplary embodiment, the system provides a mechanism by which the  
27 Customer provides payment information to UPS.

28          The iReturn System formats, and causes to be printed, a bar code representing the  
29 system tracking number for placement on an 8 ½" x 11" sheet of paper on which a user  
30 Customer will print the ARS. The bar code for the system tracking number would allow  
31 warehouse personnel to match physically received packages with information in the returns  
32 record database. The presence of the bar code on the label also facilitates recognition by

1 warehouse personnel of a received package for identification to the system during the Receive  
2 Package API process.

3 The iReturn System also formats and causes to be printed a location of a retail shipping  
4 center, such as, for example, a Mail Boxes Etc., nearest to the customer's location. As part of  
5 the label, in one embodiment, the iReturn System also prints a record number so that the retail  
6 shipping center can access the iReturn System to view the record for the package. In one  
7 exemplary embodiment, the iReturn System also prints the location of the nearest retail store of  
8 the Merchant's.

9 The iReturn System causes the display of instructions to print the ARS using a laser  
10 printer, the appropriate way to tape the label on to the package, and to take the package to the  
11 Post Office or retail shipping center. Below the fold of the label, the iReturn System inserts a  
12 URL link back to the Merchant's website. Exemplary instructions are similar to those identified  
13 in FIG. 75b.

14  
15 3.) Print a Traveler Label

16 The iReturn System provides the ability for a customer to prepare packages for shipping  
17 and print what is referred to herein as a "Traveler" Label for use by a retail shipping center, for  
18 example, a Mail Boxes Etc. location near the customer. The customer uses the Merchant's  
19 Returns Policy Engine and Processing System to interface with the iReturn System to enter  
20 package information. Although the iReturn System provides for the printing of actual shipping  
21 labels, if, for some reason, the customer is unable or not ready to print a final shipping label,  
22 the client prints a temporary label called a Traveler.

23 The Traveler displays a bar code that contains the shipping details. When the customer  
24 delivers the package to a retail shipping location, the shipping professional scans the bar code  
25 and accesses the iReturn System to complete the process and print an actual shipping label. All  
26 the package information that the customer previously entered at his or her computer is now  
27 readily available to the retail shipping center shipping professional. At this point in time, the  
28 shipping professional weighs the package and adjusts the previously-entered weight, if  
29 necessary. Other information can be updated as well. The shipping professional then readies the  
30 package for the carrier by entering final details, printing out a final shipping label, and  
31 processing the package as shipped

1 In the exemplary embodiment, Traveler Labels contain a package number, such as a  
2 system Client Package Number, a package number for the retail shipping center, e.g., an EPSO  
3 package number for Mail Boxes Etc., or an ISRF package number.

4 To create a Traveler label, the iReturn System generates for printing the Traveler Label  
5 in PNG format on a system server. An exemplary Traveler Label is depicted in FIG. 76.

6 The iReturn System formats, and causes to be printed, a bar code 4602 representing the  
7 system tracking number 4601 for placement on an 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of paper on which a user  
8 Customer will print the Traveler Label. The bar code for the system tracking number would  
9 allow warehouse personnel to match physically received packages with information in the  
10 returns record database. The presence of the bar code on the label also facilitates recognition by  
11 warehouse personnel of a received package for identification to the system during the Receive  
12 Package API process.

13 The iReturn System also formats and causes to be printed a location of a retail shipping  
14 center, such as, for example, a Mail Boxes Etc., nearest to the customer's location. As part of  
15 the label, in one embodiment, the iReturn System also prints a record number so that the retail  
16 shipping center can access the iReturn System to view the record for the package. In one  
17 exemplary embodiment, the iReturn System also prints the location of the nearest retail store of  
18 the Merchant's.

19 The iReturn System causes the display of instructions describing how the Traveler Label  
20 is to be printed using a laser printer, that the label can not be photocopied, that the label must be  
21 placed in the clear pouch that came with the package, to affix the clear pouch to the package,  
22 and finally take the package to a retail shipping center. Below the fold of the label, the iReturn  
23 System inserts a URL link back to the Merchant's website.

24  
25 k. Label Package Response Node

26 The Label Package Response information block include all of the Label Package request  
27 elements.

28  
29 l. Configuration Parameters

30 In the exemplary embodiment, the following global API Returns configuration  
31 parameters are required. Additional rules are also listed.

32 Dropoff delay: Number of day(s) to add to create date for the expected drop-off date  
33 calculation. Value is 1 day.



1        Move\_package\_delay: Number of days until a returns package is moved from the  
2        Package table to the Package\_History table. Only use this rule when the carrier is USPS  
3        Add this value to the expected drop off date and time to determine if package must be moved.  
4        Value is 2 days.

5        NoScan\_delay: Number of days without a first scan message before a package is marked  
6        as not scanned. Only use this rule when the carrier is UPS. Add this value to the expected drop-  
7        off date and time. Value is 2 days. The first scan message will be used to move the package  
8        from the Package table to the Package\_History table. The merchant's customer service will use  
9        the No Scan Report to identify potential problem return packages. If the merchant discovers that  
10       the customer has not shipped the package yet, the merchant can:

11       -        Void the return package indicating the customer will not ship.  
12       -        Update the return package with a new expected ship date and delivery date based  
13               on the customer's feedback.

14       If the merchant discovers that the customer has shipped the package, the merchant can begin a  
15       trace of the package.

16       Late\_delay: Number of days beyond the expected delivery date before a Package is  
17       flagged as late. If the carrier is USPS the value is 2 days. If the carrier is UPS the value is 1 day.  
18       The merchant's customer service will use the Late Arrivals Report to identify potential  
19       problem return packages. If the merchant discovers that the customer has not shipped the  
20       package yet, the merchant can:

21       -        Void the return package indicating the customer will not ship.  
22       -        Update the return package with a new expected ship date and delivery date based  
23               on the customer's feedback.

24       If the merchant discovers that the customer has shipped the package, the merchant can begin a  
25       trace of the package.

26

27       9.       Inbound Manager

28       FIG. 77 is a high level interactivity diagram depicting exemplary interactivity between a  
29       Merchant and the iReturn Merchant Service Servers to request Tracking information in an  
30       exemplary embodiment of the invention. As depicted in FIG. 77, the Merchant's Returns  
31       Inbound Manager accesses the iReturn System 4000 through a computer 4008 configured with a  
32       display device 4009 and a printer device 13. The Merchant's Returns Inbound Manager  
33       computer 4008 is connected to the Merchant's system 4001, which is connected to the iReturn

1 System 4000 through the Internet 4003.

2 The Merchant's Returns Inbound Manager (alternatively, the "Returns Manager") logs  
3 in 4431 to the internal network 4001c of the Merchant's system 4001. The internal network of  
4 the Merchant's System 4001c displays to the Returns Manager's computer 4008, the Merchant's  
5 Internal Tools Screen 4432. From the Merchant's Internal Tools Screen, the Returns Manager  
6 selects the iReturn Manager Application 4433. The Merchant's internal network 4001c links to  
7 the iReturn Manager Login Screen 4434. The iReturn System 4000 displays the iReturn  
8 Manager Login Screen 4435 to the Return Manager's computer 4008/4009. The Returns  
9 Manager logs in to the iReturns System 4436. In response to the login, the iReturns System  
10 displays default inbound return shipments 4437 according to the Return Manager's login  
11 privileges as stored on the Account Database.

12 From the default display, the Return Manager selects a subset of Inbound Shipments  
13 4438. The iReturn System displays the page of data requested by the Return Manager's  
14 selection 4439. The Return Manager then selects detailed shipment tracking information 4440.  
15 The iReturn System returns detailed tracking information 4441 for the package(s) selected by  
16 the Return Manager.

17 A Warehouse manager, after going through a similar login procedure as described  
18 above, would, for example, select shipments inbound to a particular warehouse 4442. The  
19 iReturn System 4000 returns a display of Return shipments destined for the selected warehouse  
20 4443. The Warehouse manager then checks one or more boxes, each box corresponding to a  
21 particular package, to acknowledge receipt of the package 4444.

#### 22 23 10. Exporting Data from iReturns

24 FIG. 78 is a high level interactivity diagram depicting exemplary interactivity between a  
25 Merchant and the iReturn Merchant Service Servers to export data from the iReturn Merchant  
26 Service System into the Merchant's System in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. As  
27 depicted in FIG. 77, the Merchant's Returns Inbound Manager accesses the iReturn System  
28 4000 through a computer 4008 configured with a display device 4009 and a printer device 13.  
29 The Merchant's Returns Inbound Manager computer 4008 is connected to the Merchant's  
30 system 4001, which is connected to the iReturn System 4000 through the Internet 4003.

31 The Merchant's Returns Inbound Manager (alternatively, the "Returns Manager") logs  
32 in 4431 to the internal network 4001c of the Merchant's system 4001. The internal network of  
33 the Merchant's System 4001c displays to the Returns Manager's computer 4008, the Merchant's

1 Internal Tools Screen 4432. From the Merchant's Internal Tools Screen, the Returns Manager  
2 selects the iReturn Manager Application 4433. The Merchant's internal network 4001c links to  
3 the iReturn Manager Login Screen 4434. The iReturn System 4000 displays the iReturn  
4 Manager Login Screen 4435 to the Return Manager's computer 4008/4009. The Returns  
5 Manager logs in to the iReturns System 4436. In response to the login, the iReturns System  
6 displays default inbound return shipments 4437 according to the Return Manager's login  
7 privileges as stored on the Account Database.

8 From the default display, the Return Manager selects a subset of Inbound Shipments  
9 4438. The iReturn System displays the page of data requested by the Return Manager's  
10 selection 4439.

11 The Returns Manager selects the Export Data option 4450. The iReturn System 4000  
12 requests the Returns Manager to identify a file name 4451 to which the data should be exported.  
13 The Returns Manager identifies a file name 4452, either local or network. The iReturn System  
14 only downloads Return records for the Returns Manager that correspond to the relevant  
15 Merchant's account. In the exemplary embodiment, data to be downloaded is formatted as a  
16 comma-delimited flat file. The iReturn System 4000 downloads data to a drive local 4453a to  
17 the Returns Manager's computer 4008 or to a network file 4453b on the Merchant's internal  
18 network 4001c, as directed by the Returns Manager. The Returns Manager can then utilize  
19 analysis tools within the Returns Manager's computer 4008 or within the Merchant's internal  
20 network 4001c to analyze the downloaded data 4454.

## 21 22 ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

23 Although this invention has been described in certain specific embodiments, many  
24 additional modifications and variations would be apparent to those skilled in the art. It is, therefore,  
25 to be understood that this invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.  
26 Thus, the embodiments of the invention described herein should be considered in all respects as  
27 illustrative and not restrictive, the scope of the invention to be determined by the appended claims  
28 and their equivalents rather than the foregoing description.

1 WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

2

3 1. An online merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed  
4 to:

5 receive a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
6 merchandise; and

7 process said merchandise return request according to a set of return policy rules input by a  
8 merchant.

9

10 2. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 1, wherein a subset of the  
11 return policy rules input by the merchant comprising:

12 a set of return questions;

13 a set of anticipated return question responses corresponding to each of said return questions;

14 and

15 a set of return response rules, each return response rule corresponding to at least one of said  
16 anticipated return question responses.

17

18 3. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 2, wherein each return  
19 response rule comprising a set of instructions to direct said computer system to perform an action to  
20 process the return request.

21

22 4. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 3, wherein each set of  
23 return questions comprising a first return question and a set of subsequent return questions, said first  
24 return question having a corresponding set of anticipated first return question responses and each of  
25 said subsequent return questions having a corresponding set of anticipated subsequent return  
26 question responses.

27

28 5. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 4, the computer system  
29 further programmed to:

30 select from the return policy rules set by the merchant the return questions; and

31 display to the user a first selected return question.

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33 6. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 5, the computer system  
34 further programmed to:

35 receive user input of a return question answer.

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7. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 6, the computer system further programmed to:  
compare said return question answer to each of the anticipated first return question responses.

8. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 7, the computer system further programmed to:  
identify an anticipated first return question response that matches said return question answer.

9. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 8, the computer system further programmed to:  
direct the computer system to process the return request in accordance with the return question response rules that correspond to the anticipated first return question response that matches said return question answer.

10. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 9, wherein the return policy rules further comprising a selection of carriers and services with which a consumer can ship a return package.

11. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 10, the computer system further programmed to:  
calculate a shipping rate for a package specified by the return request of the consumer for each of selected services offered by each of selected carriers according to a set of pricing rules for each of the selected carriers for each of the selected services.

12. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 11, the computer system further programmed to:  
generate a display of an interactive graphic comparison of shipping rates for the return request for shipping the particular package for each of the selected services offered by each of the selected carriers.

13. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 12 wherein the interactive graphic shipping rate comparison display comprising an array.

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14. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 13 wherein said array comprising a plurality of cells.

15. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 14 wherein each of said cells comprising an intersection of a delivery date and time for a particular carrier for a particular service.

16. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 15, the computer system further programmed to:  
receive as a return order user input of a selection of one of the cells of the array.

17. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 16, the computer system further programmed to:  
generate an internal system tracking number for the return order; and  
save said internal system tracking number for the return order in a database.

18. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 17, the computer system further programmed to:  
generate a graphic representation of a shipping label corresponding to the return order; and  
display the graphic representation of the shipping label on a display monitor connected to a computer accessible by the consumer.

19. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 18, the computer system further programmed to:  
generate a set of printable shipping label data in response to a shipping label print request by the consumer.

20. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 19, the computer system further programmed to:  
send in response to a user request to print a shipping label the set of printable shipping label data to a printer connected to the computer accessible by the user.

1           21.     The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 20, wherein each return  
2     order with a tracking number is characterized by a shipping status, the computer system further  
3     programmed to:

4           generate a tracking report record depicting the shipping status of a return order in response  
5     to a user tracking report request for said return order.  
6

7           22.     An online merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed  
8     to:

9           save a set of return policy rules input by a merchant in a database; and  
10          receive a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
11     merchandise.  
12

13          23.     The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 22, said computer system  
14     further programmed to:

15          process said merchandise return request according to said set of return policy rules.  
16

17          24.     An online merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed  
18     to:

19          collect a set of return policy rules input by a merchant; and  
20          save said set of return policy rules in a database.  
21

22          25.     The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 24, said computer system  
23     further programmed to:

24          receive a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
25     merchandise.  
26

27          26.     The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 25, said computer system  
28     further programmed to:

29          process said merchandise return request according to said set of return policy rules.  
30

31          27.     An online merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed  
32     to:

33          receive a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
34     merchandise;

1 generate in response to said merchandise return request a display of an interactive graphic  
2 comparison of shipping rates for the return request for shipping a package containing an item of  
3 merchandise to be returned, said display showing a shipping rate for each of a set of services offered  
4 by each of set of carriers, said carriers and services selected by the computer system for display  
5 according to a set of return policy rules input by a merchant; and  
6 process said merchandise return request according to the set of return policy rules input by  
7 the merchant.

8  
9 28. An online merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed  
10 to save a set of return policy rules input by a merchant in a database as a three-dimensional situation  
11 response matrix, said matrix comprising:

12 a first dimension defining a set of return questions;

13 a second dimension defining, for each return question, a set of return question responses  
14 corresponding to the return question; and

15 a third dimension defining, for each return question response for each return question, a set  
16 of instructions to the computer system corresponding to the return question response corresponding  
17 to the return question.

18  
19 29. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 28, said computer system  
20 further programmed to:

21 receive a merchandise return request input by a consumer to return at least one item of  
22 merchandise; and

23 script an interactive exchange with the consumer in response to said merchandise return  
24 request according to the three-dimensional situation response matrix.

25  
26 30. The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 29, said computer system  
27 further programmed to:

28 display a first question from said set of return questions;

29 receive a first answer input by the consumer in response to said first question;

30 select from the set of return question responses corresponding to the first question a return  
31 question response that corresponds to the first answer; and

32 direct the computer system to execute each instruction in the set of instructions  
33 corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the first answer.

34



1           31.     The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 30, wherein one of the  
2 instructions in the set of instructions corresponding to the return question response that corresponds  
3 to the first answer is to ask a next question from said set of return questions.  
4

5           32.     The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 31, said computer system  
6 further programmed to:

7           display the next question from said set of return questions;  
8           receive a next answer input by the consumer in response to said next question;  
9           select from the set of return question responses corresponding to the next question a return  
10 question response that corresponds to the next answer; and  
11           direct the computer system to execute each instruction in the set of instructions  
12 corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the next answer.  
13

14           33.     The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 30, said computer system  
15 further programmed to:

16           process said merchandise return request according to the set of instructions corresponding to  
17 the return question responses corresponding to each answer by the consumer to each return question  
18 asked by the computer system.  
19

20           34.     An online merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed  
21 to:

22           display a question from a set of return questions;  
23           receive an answer input by a consumer in response to said question;  
24           select from a set of return question responses corresponding to the question a return question  
25 response that corresponds to the answer; and  
26           direct the computer system to execute each instruction in a set of instructions corresponding  
27 to the return question response that corresponds to the answer.  
28

29           35.     An online merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed  
30 to:

31           process a merchandise return request by a consumer according to a set of instructions that  
32 correspond to a set of return question responses that correspond to each answer by the consumer to  
33 each return question asked by the computer system.  
34

1           36.     The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 35, said computer system  
2 further programmed to:

3           recognize merchandise to be returned by the consumer according to product categories and  
4 product subcategories.

5

6           37.     The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 36, said computer system  
7 further programmed to:

8           execute exception instructions for merchandise comprising an exception product category.

9           38.     The online merchandise return computer system of Claim 36, said computer system  
10 further programmed to:

11          execute exception instructions for merchandise comprising an exception product  
12 subcategory.

13

14          39.     A method using a computer for online merchandise return shipping, said method  
15 comprising:

16          receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
17 merchandise; and

18          processing said merchandise return request according to a set of return policy rules input by  
19 a merchant.

20

21          40.     The method of Claim 39, wherein a subset of the return policy rules input by the  
22 merchant comprising:

23          a set of return questions;

24          a set of anticipated return question responses corresponding to each of said return questions;

25 and

26          a set of return response rules, each return response rule corresponding to at least one of said  
27 anticipated return question responses.

28

29          41.     The method of Claim 40, wherein each return response rule comprising a set of  
30 instructions to direct said computer system to perform an action to process the return request.

31

32          42.     The method of Claim 41, wherein each set of return questions comprising a first  
33 return question and a set of subsequent return questions, said first return question having a  
34 corresponding set of anticipated first return question responses and each of said subsequent return  
35 questions having a corresponding set of anticipated subsequent return question responses.

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43. The method of Claim 42, the method further comprising:  
selecting from the return policy rules set by the merchant the return questions; and  
displaying to the user a first selected return question.

44. The method of Claim 43, the method further comprising:  
receiving user input of a return question answer.

45. The method of Claim 44, the method further comprising:  
comparing said return question answer to each of the anticipated first return question  
responses.

46. The method of Claim 45 the method further comprising:  
identifying an anticipated first return question response that matches said return question  
answer.

47. The method of Claim 46, the method further comprising:  
directing the computer system to process the return request in accordance with the return  
question response rules that correspond to the anticipated first return question response that matches  
said return question answer.

48. The method of Claim 47, wherein the return policy rules further comprising a  
selection of carriers and services with which a consumer can ship a return package.

49. The method of Claim 48, the method further comprising:  
calculating a shipping rate for a package specified by the return request of the consumer for  
each of selected services offered by each of selected carriers according to a set of pricing rules for  
each of the selected carriers for each of the selected services.

50. The method of Claim 49, the method further comprising:  
generating a display of an interactive graphic comparison of shipping rates for the return  
request for shipping the particular package for each of the selected services offered by each of the  
selected carriers.

- 1           51.     The method of Claim 50 wherein the interactive graphic shipping rate comparison  
2 display comprising an array.  
3
- 4           52.     The method of Claim 51 wherein said array comprising a plurality of cells.  
5
- 6           53.     The method of Claim 52 wherein each of said cells comprising an intersection of a  
7 delivery date and time for a particular carrier for a particular service.  
8
- 9           54.     The method of Claim 53, the method further comprising:  
10 receiving as a return order user input of a selection of one of the cells of the array.  
11
- 12          55.     The method of Claim 54, the method further comprising:  
13 generating an internal system tracking number for the return order; and  
14 saving said internal system tracking number for the return order in a database.  
15
- 16          56.     The method of Claim 55, the method further comprising:  
17 generating a graphic representation of a shipping label corresponding to the return order; and  
18 displaying the graphic representation of the shipping label on a display monitor connected to  
19 a computer accessible by the consumer.  
20
- 21          57.     The method of Claim 56, the method further comprising:  
22 generating a set of printable shipping label data in response to a shipping label print request  
23 by the consumer.  
24
- 25          58.     The method of Claim 57, the method further comprising:  
26 sending in response to a user request to print a shipping label the set of printable shipping  
27 label data to a printer connected to the computer accessible by the user.  
28
- 29          59.     The method of Claim 58, wherein each return order with a tracking number is  
30 characterized by a shipping status, the method further comprising:  
31 generating a tracking report record depicting the shipping status of a return order in response  
32 to a user tracking report request for said return order.  
33
- 34          60.     A method using a computer for online merchandise return shipping, said method  
35 comprising:

1        saving a set of return policy rules input by a merchant in a database; and  
2        receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
3 merchandise.

4  
5        61.     The method of Claim 60, said method further comprising:  
6        processing said merchandise return request according to said set of return policy rules.

7  
8        62.     A method using a computer for online merchandise return shipping, said method  
9 comprising:  
10        collecting a set of return policy rules input by a merchant; and  
11        saving said set of return policy rules in a database.

12  
13        63.     The method of Claim 62, said method further comprising:  
14        receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
15 merchandise.

16  
17        64.     The method of Claim 63, said method further comprising  
18        processing said merchandise return request according to said set of return policy rules.

19  
20        65.     A method using a computer for online merchandise return shipping, said method  
21 comprising:  
22        receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
23 merchandise;  
24        generating in response to said merchandise return request a display of an interactive graphic  
25 comparison of shipping rates for the return request for shipping a package containing an item of  
26 merchandise to be returned, said display showing a shipping rate for each of a set of services offered  
27 by each of set of carriers, said carriers and services selected by the computer system for display  
28 according to a set of return policy rules input by a merchant; and  
29        processing said merchandise return request according to the set of return policy rules input  
30 by the merchant.

31  
32        66.     A method using a computer for online merchandise return shipping, said method  
33 comprising saving a set of return policy rules input by a merchant in a database as a three-  
34 dimensional situation response matrix, said matrix comprising:

1 a first dimension defining a set of return questions; a second dimension defining, for each  
2 return question, a set of return question responses corresponding to the return question; and  
3 a third dimension defining, for each return question response for each return question, a set  
4 of instructions to the computer system corresponding to the return question response corresponding  
5 to the return question.

6  
7 67. The method of Claim 66, said method further comprising:  
8 receiving a merchandise return request input by a consumer to return at least one item of  
9 merchandise; and  
10 scripting an interactive exchange with the consumer in response to said merchandise return  
11 request according to the three-dimensional situation response matrix.

12  
13 68. The method of Claim 67, said method further comprising:  
14 displaying a first question from said set of return questions;  
15 receiving a first answer input by the consumer in response to said first question;  
16 selecting from the set of return question responses corresponding to the first question a  
17 return question response that corresponds to the first answer; and  
18 directing the computer system to execute each instruction in the set of instructions  
19 corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the first answer.

20  
21 69. The method of Claim 68, wherein one of the instructions in the set of instructions  
22 corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the first answer is to ask a next  
23 question from said set of return questions.

24  
25 70. The method of Claim 69, said method further comprising:  
26 displaying the next question from said set of return questions;  
27 receiving a next answer input by the consumer in response to said next question;  
28 selecting from the set of return question responses corresponding to the next question a  
29 return question response that corresponds to the next answer; and  
30 directing the computer system to execute each instruction in the set of instructions  
31 corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the next answer.

32  
33 71. The method of Claim 68, said method further comprising:

1           processing said merchandise return request according to the set of instructions  
2           corresponding to the return question responses corresponding to each answer by the consumer to  
3           each return question asked by the computer system.  
4

5           72.     A method using a computer for online merchandise return shipping, said method  
6           comprising:

7           displaying a question from a set of return questions;  
8           receiving an answer input by a consumer in response to said question;  
9           selecting from a set of return question responses corresponding to the question a return  
10          question response that corresponds to the answer; and  
11          directing the computer system to execute each instruction in a set of instructions  
12          corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the answer.  
13

14          73.     A method using a computer for online merchandise return shipping, said method  
15          comprising:

16          processing a merchandise return request by a consumer according to a set of instructions that  
17          correspond to a set of return question responses that correspond to each answer by the consumer to  
18          each return question asked by the computer system.  
19

20          74.     The method of Claim 73, said method further comprising:  
21          recognizing merchandise to be returned by the consumer according to product categories  
22          and product subcategories.  
23

24          75.     The method of Claim 74, said method further comprising:  
25          executing exception instructions for merchandise comprising an exception product category.  
26

27          76.     The method of Claim 74, said method further comprising:  
28          executing exception instructions for merchandise comprising an exception product  
29          subcategory.  
30

31          77.     A computer product for online merchandise return shipping, said computer product  
32          having instructions for:

33          receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
34          merchandise; and

1           processing said merchandise return request according to a set of return policy rules input by  
2   a merchant.

3

4           78.     The computer product of Claim 77, wherein a subset of the return policy rules input  
5   by the merchant comprising:

6           a set of return questions;

7           a set of anticipated return question responses corresponding to each of said return questions;

8   and

9           a set of return response rules, each return response rule corresponding to at least one of said  
10   anticipated return question responses.

11          79.     The computer product of Claim 78, wherein each return response rule comprising a  
12   set of instructions to direct said computer system to perform an action to process the return request.

13

14          80.     The computer product of Claim 79, wherein each set of return questions comprising  
15   a first return question and a set of subsequent return questions, said first return question having a  
16   corresponding set of anticipated first return question responses and each of said subsequent return  
17   questions having a corresponding set of anticipated subsequent return question responses.

18

19          81.     The computer product of Claim 80, the computer product having further instructions  
20   for:

21           selecting from the return policy rules set by the merchant the return questions; and

22           displaying to the user a first selected return question.

23

24          82.     The computer product of Claim 81, the computer product having further instructions  
25   for:

26           receiving user input of a return question answer.

27

28          83.     The computer product of Claim 82, the computer product having further instructions  
29   for:

30           comparing said return question answer to each of the anticipated first return question

31   responses.

32

33          84.     The computer product of Claim 83, the computer product having further instructions  
34   for:



1 identifying an anticipated first return question response that matches said return question  
2 answer.

3

4 85. The computer product of Claim 84, the computer product having further instructions  
5 for:

6 directing the computer system to process the return request in accordance with the return  
7 question response rules that correspond to the anticipated first return question response that matches  
8 said return question answer.

9

10 86. The computer product of Claim 85, wherein the return policy rules further  
11 comprising a selection of carriers and services with which a consumer can ship a return package.

12

13 87. The computer product of Claim 86, the computer product having further instructions  
14 for:

15 calculating a shipping rate for a package specified by the return request of the consumer for  
16 each of selected services offered by each of selected carriers according to a set of pricing rules for  
17 each of the selected carriers for each of the selected services.

18

19 88. The computer product of Claim 87, the computer product having further instructions  
20 for:

21 generating a display of an interactive graphic comparison of shipping rates for the return  
22 request for shipping the particular package for each of the selected services offered by each of the  
23 selected carriers.

24

25 89. The computer product of Claim 88 wherein the interactive graphic shipping rate  
26 comparison display comprising an array.

27

28 90. The computer product of Claim 89 wherein said array comprising a plurality of cells.

29

30 91. The computer product of Claim 90 wherein each of said cells comprising an  
31 intersection of a delivery date and time for a particular carrier for a particular service.

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33 92. The computer product of Claim 91, the computer product having further instructions  
34 for:

35 receiving as a return order user input of a selection of one of the cells of the array.

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93. The computer product of Claim 92, the computer product having further instructions for:  
generating an internal system tracking number for the return order; and  
saving said internal system tracking number for the return order in a database.

94. The computer product of Claim 93, the computer product having further instructions for:  
generating a graphic representation of a shipping label corresponding to the return order; and  
displaying the graphic representation of the shipping label on a display monitor connected to  
a computer accessible by the consumer.

95. The computer product of Claim 94, the computer product having further instructions for:  
generating a set of printable shipping label data in response to a shipping label print request  
by the consumer.

96. The computer product of Claim 95, the computer product having further instructions for:  
sending in response to a user request to print a shipping label the set of printable shipping  
label data to a printer connected to the computer accessible by the user.

97. The computer product of Claim 96, wherein each return order with a tracking  
number is characterized by a shipping status, the computer product having further instructions for:  
generating a tracking report record depicting the shipping status of a return order in response  
to a user tracking report request for said return order.

98. A computer product for online merchandise return shipping, said computer product  
having instructions for:  
saving a set of return policy rules input by a merchant in a database; and  
receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
merchandise.

99. The computer product of Claim 98, the computer product having further instructions  
for:

1 processing said merchandise return request according to said set of return policy rules.

2

3 100. A computer product for online merchandise return shipping, said computer product  
4 having instructions for:

5 collecting a set of return policy rules input by a merchant; and

6 saving said set of return policy rules in a database.

7

8 101. The computer product of Claim 100, the computer product having further  
9 instructions for:

10 receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
11 merchandise.

12

13 102. The computer product of Claim 101, the computer product having further  
14 instructions for:

15 processing said merchandise return request according to said set of return policy rules.

16

17 103. A computer product for online merchandise return shipping, said computer product  
18 having instructions for:

19 receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of  
20 merchandise;

21 generating in response to said merchandise return request a display of an interactive graphic  
22 comparison of shipping rates for the return request for shipping a package containing an item of  
23 merchandise to be returned, said display showing a shipping rate for each of a set of services offered  
24 by each of set of carriers, said carriers and services selected by the computer system for display  
25 according to a set of return policy rules input by a merchant; and

26 processing said merchandise return request according to the set of return policy rules input  
27 by the merchant.

28

29 104. A computer product for online merchandise return shipping, said computer product  
30 having instructions for saving a set of return policy rules input by a merchant in a database as a  
31 three-dimensional situation response matrix, said matrix comprising:

32 a first dimension defining a set of return questions;

33 a second dimension defining, for each return question, a set of return question responses  
34 corresponding to the return question; and

1 a third dimension defining, for each return question response for each return question, a set  
2 of instructions to the computer system corresponding to the return question response corresponding  
3 to the return question.  
4

5 105. The computer product of Claim 104, the computer product having further  
6 instructions for:

7 receiving a merchandise return request input by a consumer to return at least one item of  
8 merchandise; and

9 scripting an interactive exchange with the consumer in response to said merchandise return  
10 request according to the three-dimensional situation response matrix.  
11

12 106. The computer product of Claim 105, the computer product having further  
13 instructions for:

14 displaying a first question from said set of return questions;

15 receiving a first answer input by the consumer in response to said first question;

16 selecting from the set of return question responses corresponding to the first question a  
17 return question response that corresponds to the first answer; and

18 directing the computer system to execute each instruction in the set of instructions  
19 corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the first answer.  
20

21 107. The computer product of Claim 106, wherein one of the instructions in the set of  
22 instructions corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the first answer is to  
23 ask a next question from said set of return questions.  
24

25 108. The computer product of Claim 107, the computer product having further  
26 instructions for:

27 displaying the next question from said set of return questions;

28 receiving a next answer input by the consumer in response to said next question;

29 selecting from the set of return question responses corresponding to the next question a  
30 return question response that corresponds to the next answer; and

31 directing the computer system to execute each instruction in the set of instructions  
32 corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the next answer.  
33

34 109. The computer product of Claim 106, the computer product having further  
35 instructions for:

1           processing said merchandise return request according to the set of instructions  
2           corresponding to the return question responses corresponding to each answer by the consumer to  
3           each return question asked by the computer system.  
4

5           110.   A computer product for online merchandise return shipping, said computer product  
6           having instructions for:

7           displaying a question from a set of return questions;  
8           receiving an answer input by a consumer in response to said question;  
9           selecting from a set of return question responses corresponding to the question a return  
10          question response that corresponds to the answer; and  
11          directing the computer system to execute each instruction in a set of instructions  
12          corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the answer.  
13

14          111.   A computer product for online merchandise return shipping, said computer product  
15          having instructions for:

16          processing a merchandise return request by a consumer according to a set of instructions that  
17          correspond to a set of return question responses that correspond to each answer by the consumer to  
18          each return question asked by the computer system.  
19

20          112.   The computer product of Claim 111, the computer product having further  
21          instructions for:

22          recognizing merchandise to be returned by the consumer according to product categories  
23          and product subcategories.  
24

25          113.   The computer product of Claim 112, the computer product having further  
26          instructions for:

27          executing exception instructions for merchandise comprising an exception product category.  
28

29          114.   The computer product of Claim 112, the computer product having further  
30          instructions for:

31          executing exception instructions for merchandise comprising an exception product  
32          subcategory.  
33

34          115.   A computer system for online merchandise return shipping, said computer system  
35          comprising:

1 a set of instructions for receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at  
2 least one item of merchandise; and  
3 a set of instructions for processing said merchandise return request according to a set of  
4 return policy rules input by a merchant.  
5

6 116. The computer system of Claim 115, wherein a subset of the return policy rules input  
7 by the merchant comprising:

8 a set of return questions;  
9 a set of anticipated return question responses corresponding to each of said return questions;  
10 and  
11 a set of return response rules, each return response rule corresponding to at least one of said  
12 anticipated return question responses.  
13

14 117. The computer system of Claim 116, wherein each return response rule comprising a  
15 set of instructions to direct said computer system to perform an action to process the return request.  
16

17 118. The computer system of Claim 117, wherein each set of return questions comprising  
18 a first return question and a set of subsequent return questions, said first return question having a  
19 corresponding set of anticipated first return question responses and each of said subsequent return  
20 questions having a corresponding set of anticipated subsequent return question responses.  
21

22 119. The computer system of Claim 118, the computer system further comprising:  
23 a set of instructions for selecting from the return policy rules set by the merchant the return  
24 questions; and  
25 a set of instructions for displaying to the user a first selected return question.  
26

27 120. The computer system of Claim 119, the computer system further comprising:  
28 a set of instructions for receiving user input of a return question answer.  
29

30 121. The computer system of Claim 120, the computer system further comprising:  
31 a set of instructions for comparing said return question answer to each of the anticipated first  
32 return question responses.  
33

34 122. The computer system of Claim 121 the computer system further comprising:

1 a set of instructions for identifying an anticipated first return question response that matches  
2 said return question answer.

3  
4 123. The computer system of Claim 122, the computer system further comprising:  
5 a set of instructions for directing the computer system to process the return request in  
6 accordance with the return question response rules that correspond to the anticipated first return  
7 question response that matches said return question answer.

8  
9 124. The computer system of Claim 123, wherein the return policy rules further  
10 comprising a selection of carriers and services with which a consumer can ship a return package.

11  
12 125. The computer system of Claim 124, the computer system further comprising:  
13 a set of instructions for calculating a shipping rate for a package specified by the return  
14 request of the consumer for each of selected services offered by each of selected carriers according  
15 to a set of pricing rules for each of the selected carriers for each of the selected services.

16  
17 126. The computer system of Claim 125, the computer system further comprising:  
18 a set of instructions for generating a display of an interactive graphic comparison of  
19 shipping rates for the return request for shipping the particular package for each of the selected  
20 services offered by each of the selected carriers.

21  
22 127. The computer system of Claim 126 wherein the interactive graphic shipping rate  
23 comparison display comprising an array.

24  
25 128. The computer system of Claim 127 wherein said array comprising a plurality of  
26 cells.

27  
28 129. The computer system of Claim 128 wherein each of said cells comprising an  
29 intersection of a delivery date and time for a particular carrier for a particular service.

30  
31 130. The computer system of Claim 129, the computer system further comprising:  
32 a set of instructions for receiving as a return order user input of a selection of one of the cells  
33 of the array.

34  
35 131. The computer system of Claim 130, the computer system further comprising:

1 a set of instructions for generating an internal system tracking number for the return order;  
2 and  
3 a set of instructions for saving said internal system tracking number for the return order in a  
4 database.

5  
6 132. The computer system of Claim 131, the computer system further comprising:  
7 a set of instructions for generating a graphic representation of a shipping label corresponding  
8 to the return order; and  
9 a set of instructions for displaying the graphic representation of the shipping label on a  
10 display monitor connected to a computer accessible by the consumer.

11  
12 133. The computer system of Claim 132, the computer system further comprising:  
13 a set of instructions for generating a set of printable shipping label data in response to a  
14 shipping label print request by the consumer.

15  
16 134. The computer system of Claim 133, the computer system further comprising:  
17 a set of instructions for sending in response to a user request to print a shipping label the set  
18 of printable shipping label data to a printer connected to the computer accessible by the user.

19  
20 135. The computer system of Claim 134, wherein each return order with a tracking  
21 number is characterized by a shipping status, the computer system further comprising:  
22 a set of instructions for generating a tracking report record depicting the shipping status of a  
23 return order in response to a user tracking report request for said return order.

24  
25 136. A computer system for online merchandise return shipping, said computer system  
26 comprising:  
27 a set of instructions for saving a set of return policy rules input by a merchant in a database;  
28 and  
29 a set of instructions for receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at  
30 least one item of merchandise.

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33 137. The computer system of Claim 136, said computer system further comprising:  
34 a set of instructions for processing said merchandise return request according to said set of  
35 return policy rules.



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138. A computer system for online merchandise return shipping, said computer system comprising:

- a set of instructions for collecting a set of return policy rules input by a merchant; and
- a set of instructions for saving said set of return policy rules in a database.

139. The computer system of Claim 138, said computer system further comprising:  
a set of instructions for receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of merchandise.

140. The computer system of Claim 139, said computer system further comprising:  
a set of instructions for processing said merchandise return request according to said set of return policy rules.

141. A computer system for online merchandise return shipping, said computer system comprising:  
a set of instructions for receiving a merchandise return request by a consumer to return at least one item of merchandise;  
a set of instructions for generating in response to said merchandise return request a display of an interactive graphic comparison of shipping rates for the return request for shipping a package containing an item of merchandise to be returned, said display showing a shipping rate for each of a set of services offered by each of set of carriers, said carriers and services selected by the computer system for display according to a set of return policy rules input by a merchant; and  
a set of instructions for processing said merchandise return request according to the set of return policy rules input by the merchant.

142. A computer system for online merchandise return shipping, said computer system comprising a set of instructions for saving a set of return policy rules input by a merchant in a database as a three-dimensional situation response matrix, said matrix comprising:  
a first dimension defining a set of return questions;  
a second dimension defining, for each return question, a set of return question responses corresponding to the return question; and  
a third dimension defining, for each return question response for each return question, a set of instructions to the computer system corresponding to the return question response corresponding to the return question.

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143. The computer system of Claim 142, said computer system further comprising:  
a set of instructions for receiving a merchandise return request input by a consumer to return  
at least one item of merchandise; and  
a set of instructions for scripting an interactive exchange with the consumer in response to  
said merchandise return request according to the three-dimensional situation response matrix.

144. The computer system of Claim 143, said computer system further comprising:  
a set of instructions for displaying a first question from said set of return questions;  
a set of instructions for receiving a first answer input by the consumer in response to said  
first question;  
a set of instructions for selecting from the set of return question responses corresponding to  
the first question a return question response that corresponds to the first answer; and  
a set of instructions for directing the computer system to execute each instruction in the set  
of instructions corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the first answer.

145. The computer system of Claim 144, wherein one of the instructions in the set of  
instructions corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the first answer is to  
ask a next question from said set of return questions.

146. The computer system of Claim 145, said computer system further comprising:  
a set of instructions for displaying the next question from said set of return questions;  
a set of instructions for receiving a next answer input by the consumer in response to said  
next question;  
a set of instructions for selecting from the set of return question responses corresponding to  
the next question a return question response that corresponds to the next answer; and  
a set of instructions for directing the computer system to execute each instruction in the set  
of instructions corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the next answer.

147. The computer system of Claim 144, said computer system further comprising:  
a set of instructions for processing said merchandise return request according to the set of  
instructions corresponding to the return question responses corresponding to each answer by the  
consumer to each return question asked by the computer system.

- 1           148.   A computer system for online merchandise return shipping, said computer system  
2 comprising:  
3           a set of instructions for displaying a question from a set of return questions;  
4           a set of instructions for receiving an answer input by a consumer in response to said  
5 question;  
6           a set of instructions for selecting from a set of return question responses corresponding to  
7 the question a return question response that corresponds to the answer; and  
8           a set of instructions for directing the computer system to execute each instruction in a set of  
9 instructions corresponding to the return question response that corresponds to the answer.  
10
- 11           149.   A computer system for online merchandise return shipping, said computer system  
12 comprising:  
13           a set of instructions for processing a merchandise return request by a consumer according to  
14 a set of instructions that correspond to a set of return question responses that correspond to each  
15 answer by the consumer to each return question asked by the computer system.  
16
- 17           150.   The computer system of Claim 149, said computer system further comprising:  
18           a set of instructions for recognizing merchandise to be returned by the consumer according  
19 to product categories and product subcategories.  
20
- 21           151.   The computer system of Claim 150, said computer system further comprising:  
22           a set of instructions for executing exception instructions for merchandise comprising an  
23 exception product category.  
24
- 25           152.   The computer system of Claim 150, said computer system further comprising:  
26           a set of instructions for executing exception instructions for merchandise comprising an  
27 exception product subcategory.  
28
- 29           153.   A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
30           receive from a second computer system a request to rate shipment of a particular  
31 package by a plurality of carriers.  
32
- 33           154.   A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
34           calculate a plurality of shipment rates for shipping a particular package in response to a  
35 request to rate shipment received from a second computer system.

1

2       155.   The computer system of Claim 153, wherein each of the plurality of shipment  
3 rates corresponds to one of a plurality of carriers shipping the particular package according to  
4 one of a plurality of services offered by the carrier.

5

6       156.   A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
7 receive from a second computer system a request to process return shipment of a  
8 particular package by one of a plurality of carriers.

9

10       157.   The computer system of Claim 156, said computer system further programmed  
11 to:

12 generate a response to the second computer system comprising a status of the request.

13

14       158.   The computer system of Claim 157, wherein the status comprises one of a  
15 plurality of error conditions or a successful condition.

16

17       159.   A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
18 calculate a shipment rate for shipping a particular package in response to a request  
19 received from a second computer system to process return shipment of a particular package by  
20 one of a plurality of carriers.

21

22       160.   A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
23 generate as a response to a second computer system a shipping label for shipping a  
24 particular package in response to a request received from the second computer system to  
25 prepare a shipping label for shipping a particular package by one of a plurality of carriers.

26

27       161.   The computer system of Claim 160, said computer system further programmed  
28 to:

29 send the shipping label response to the second computer system.

30

31       162.   A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
32 generate as a response to a second computer system a merchandise return label for return  
33 shipping of a particular package in response to a request received from the second computer

1 system to prepare a merchandise return label for return shipping a particular package by one of  
2 a plurality of carriers.

3  
4 163. The computer system of Claim 162, said computer system further programmed  
5 to:  
6 send the merchandise return label response to the second computer system.

7  
8 164. A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
9 designate as received a status of a particular return record in a database in response to a  
10 request received from a second computer system to identify as received a particular package,  
11 wherein the particular return record corresponds to the particular package.

12  
13 165. A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
14 obtain in response to a request received from a second computer system to process  
15 return shipment of a particular package a shipping status for the particular package from a  
16 carrier computer system.

17  
18 166. A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
19 store in a database a return record corresponding to a particular package in response to a  
20 request received from a second computer system to process return shipment of the particular  
21 package by one of a plurality of carriers.

22  
23 167. A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
24 generate a request to process return shipment of a particular package by one of a  
25 plurality of carriers; and  
26 insert into the request a digital address of a second computer, said digital address  
27 corresponding to a location of said second computer in a global communications network.

28  
29 168. A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
30 generate a request to prepare a return shipping label for shipping a particular package by  
31 one of a plurality of carriers; and  
32 insert into the request a digital address of a second computer, said digital address  
33 corresponding to a location of said second computer in a global communications network.

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27  
28  
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33

169. A merchandise return computer system, said computer system programmed to:  
generate a request to prepare a merchandise return label for processing shipment of a  
particular package; and  
insert into the request a digital address of a second computer, said digital address  
corresponding to a location of said second computer in a global communications network.

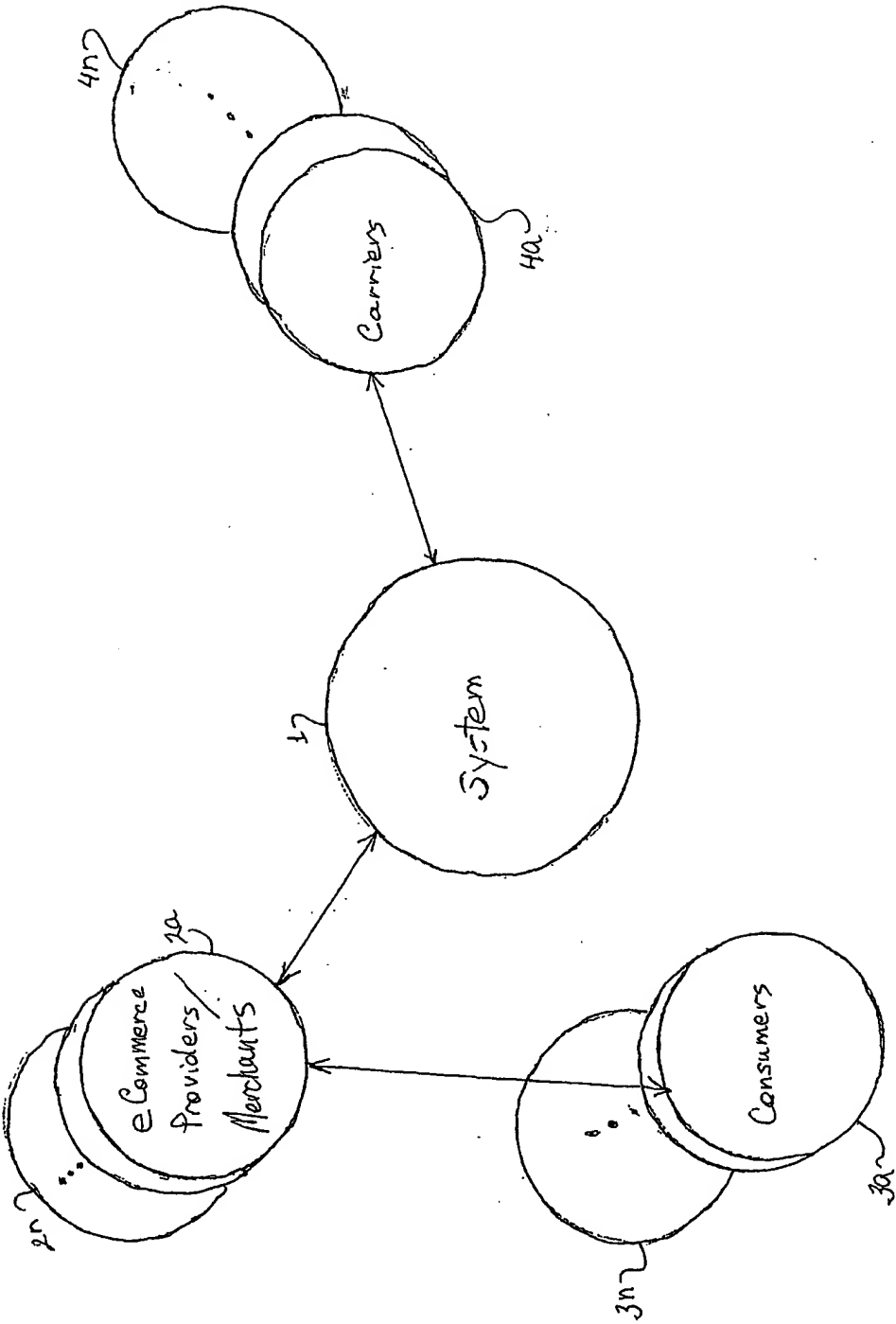
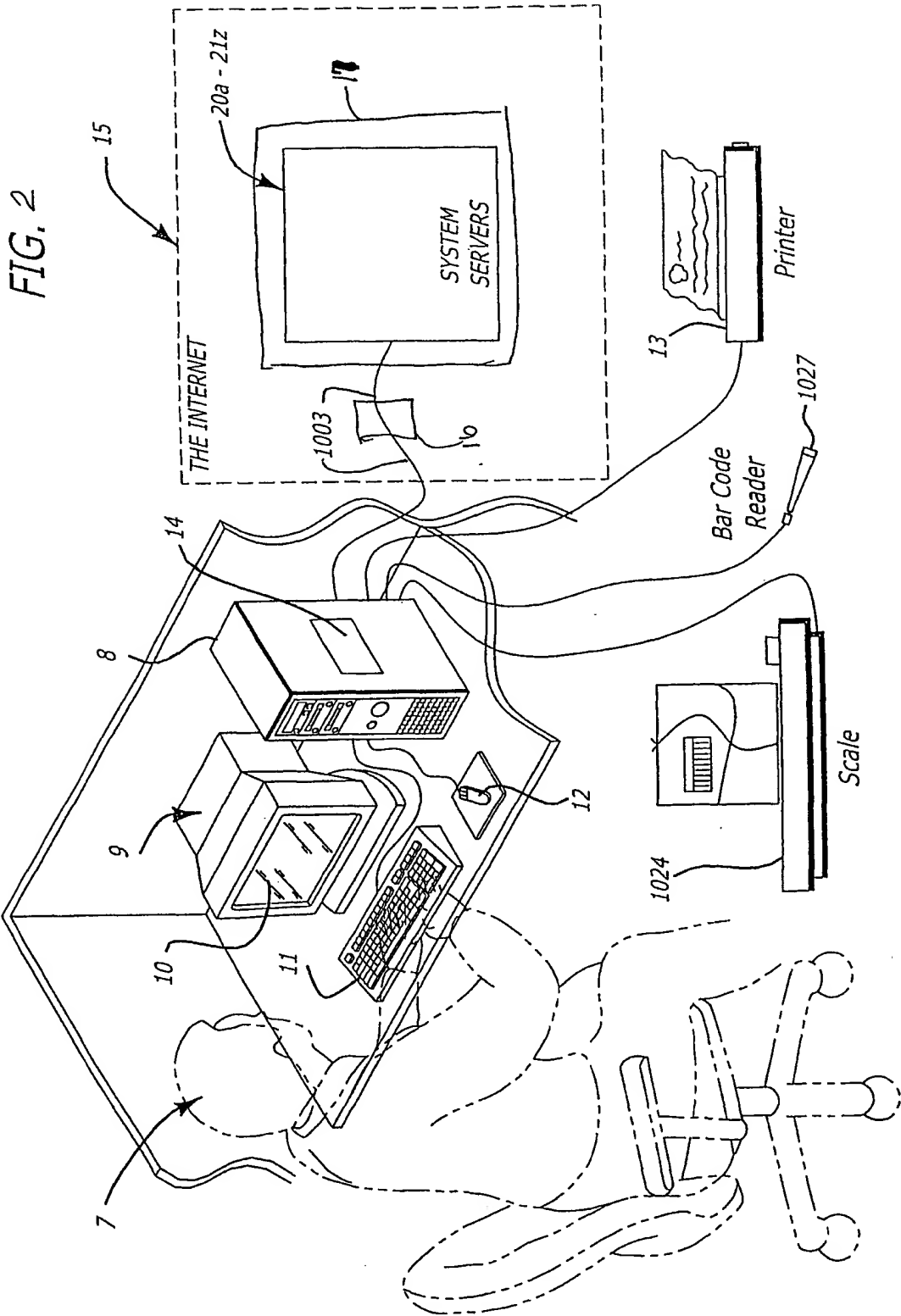


FIG. 1





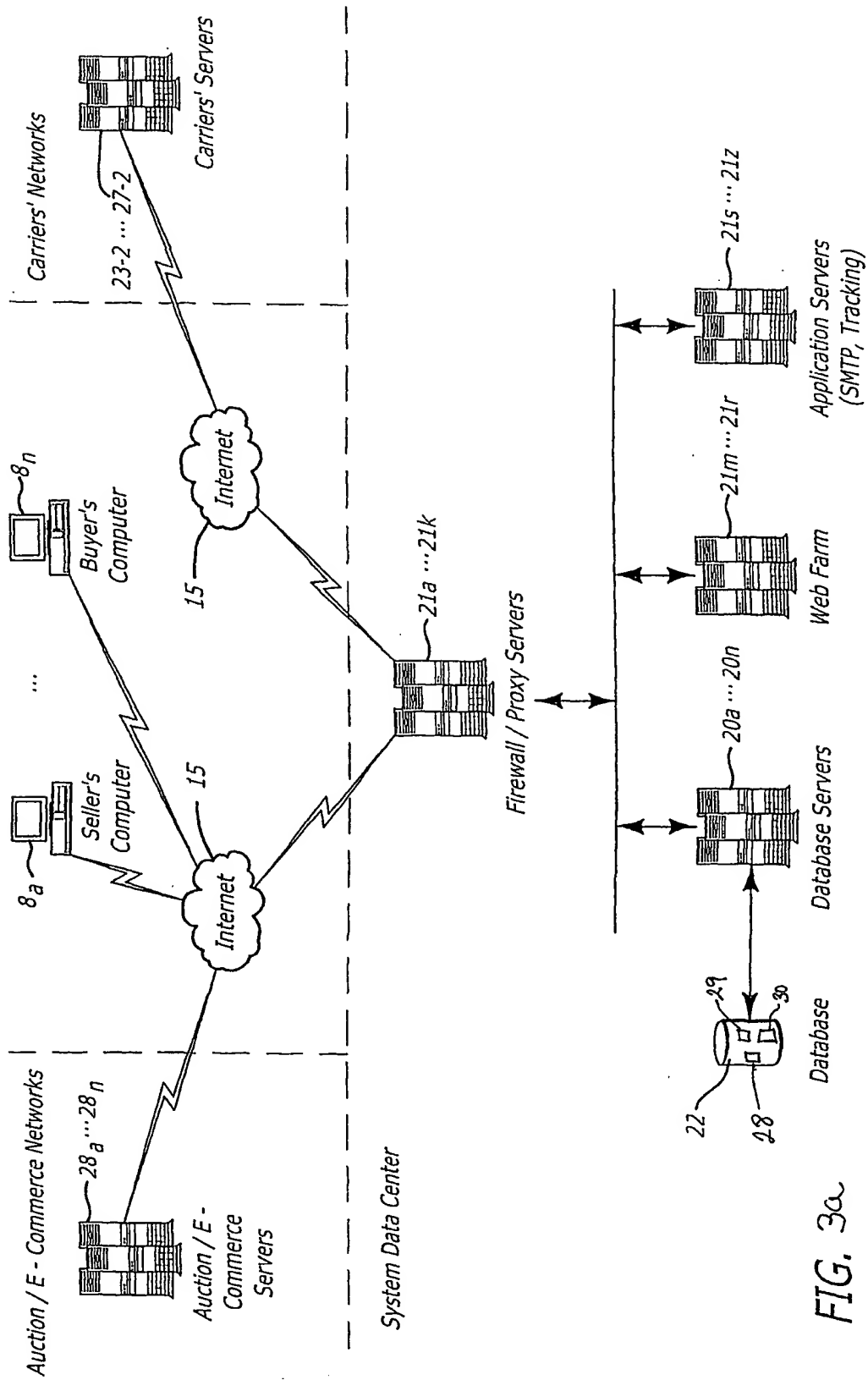


FIG. 3a

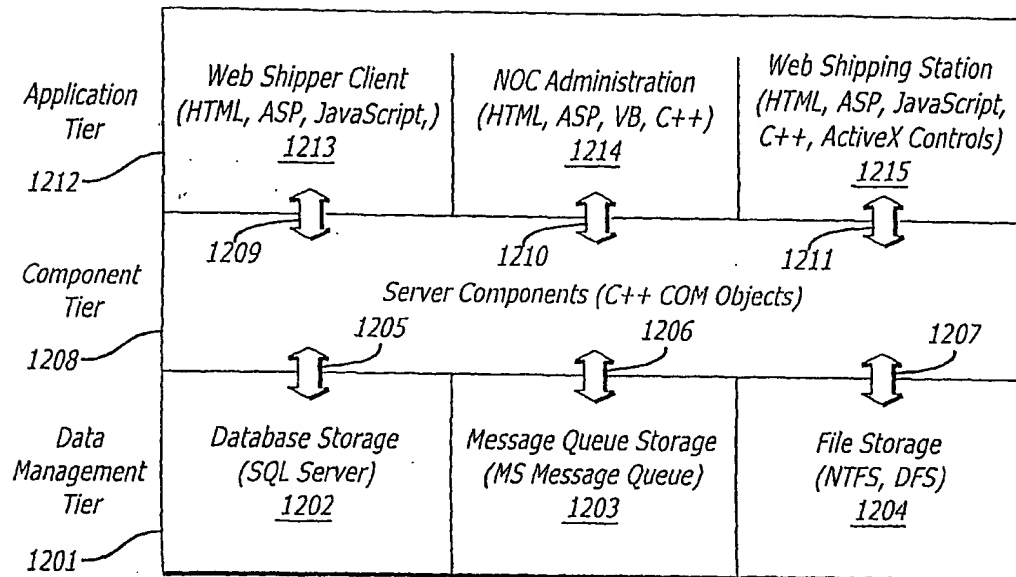


FIG. 3b

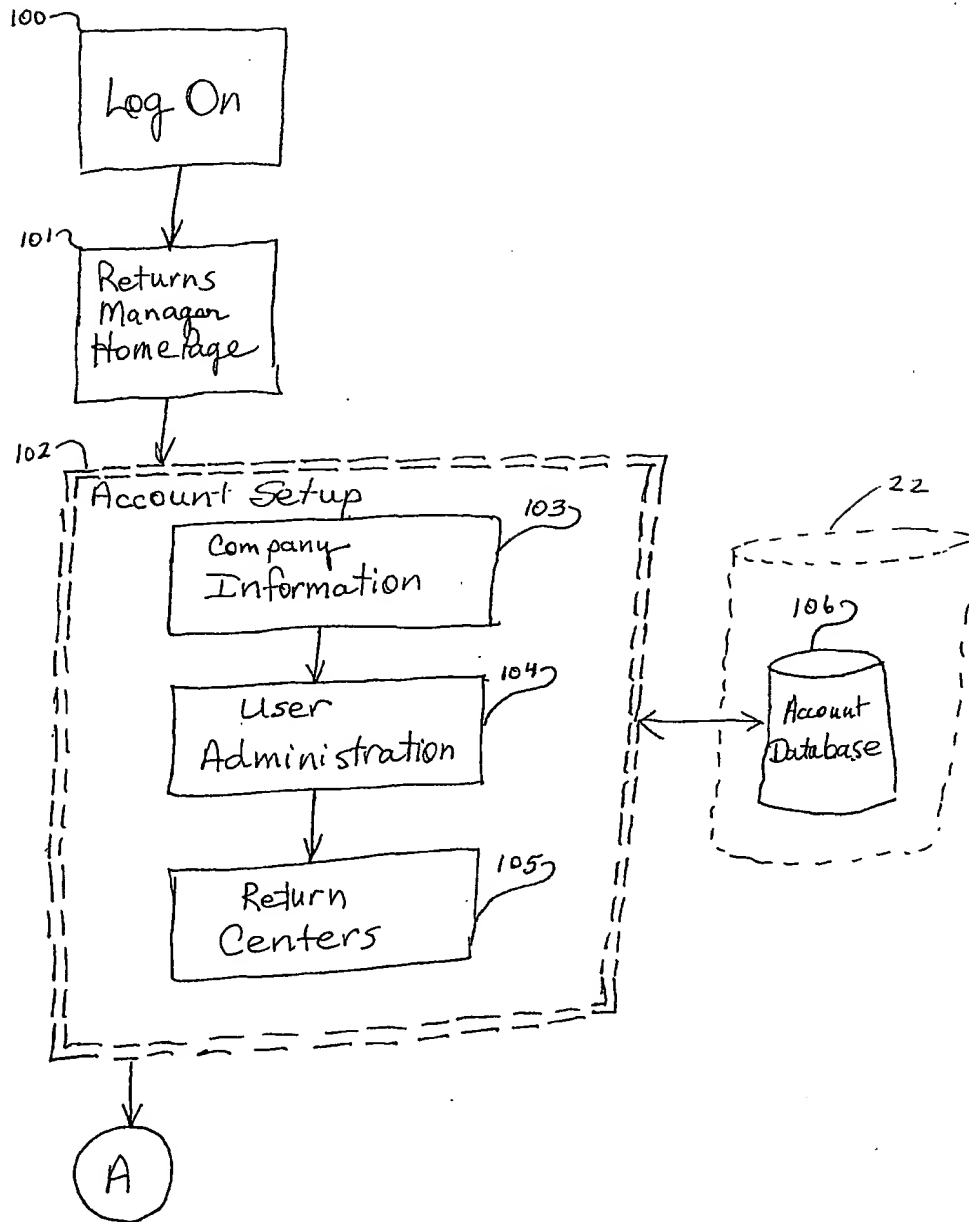


FIG. 4a

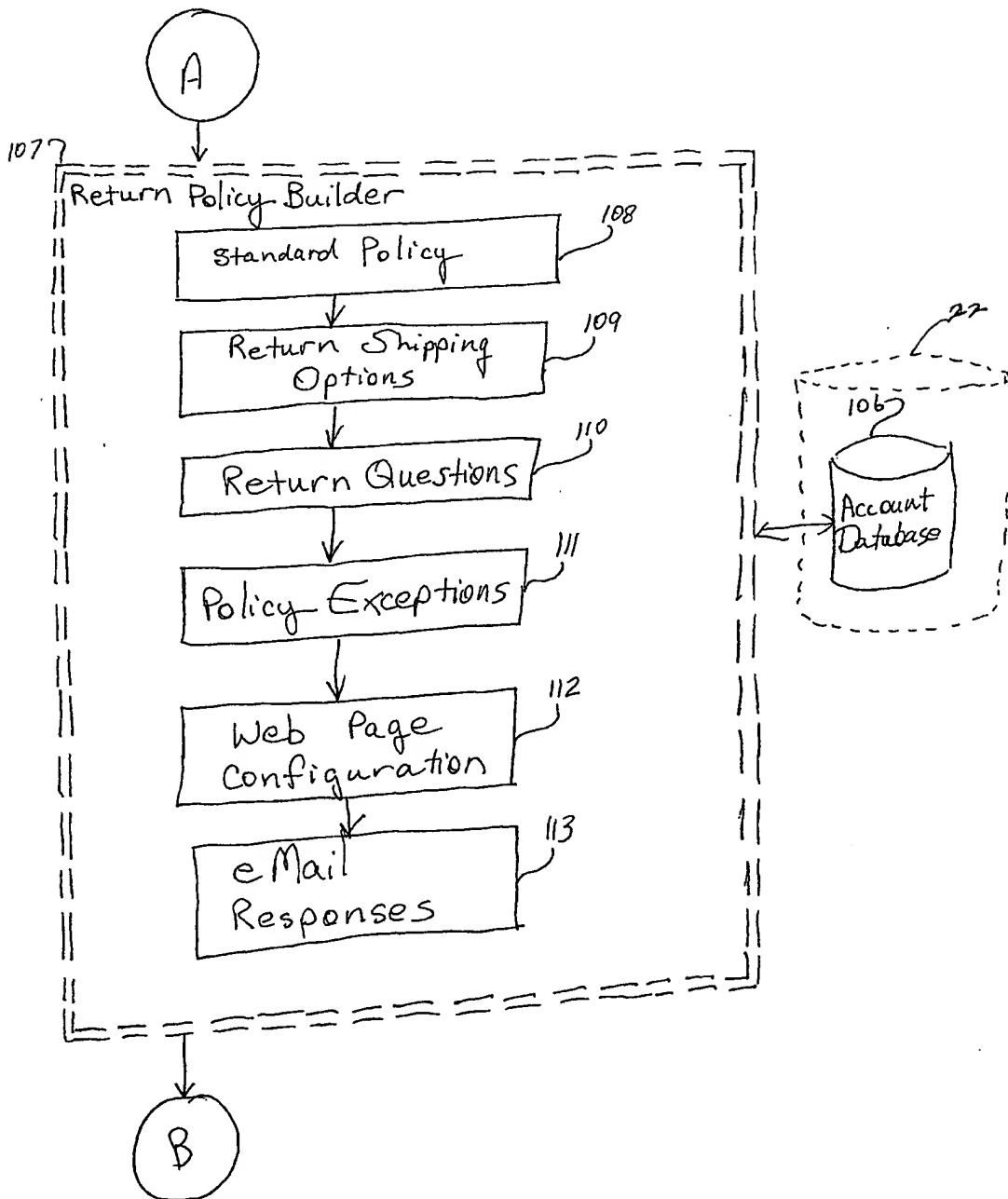


FIG. 4b

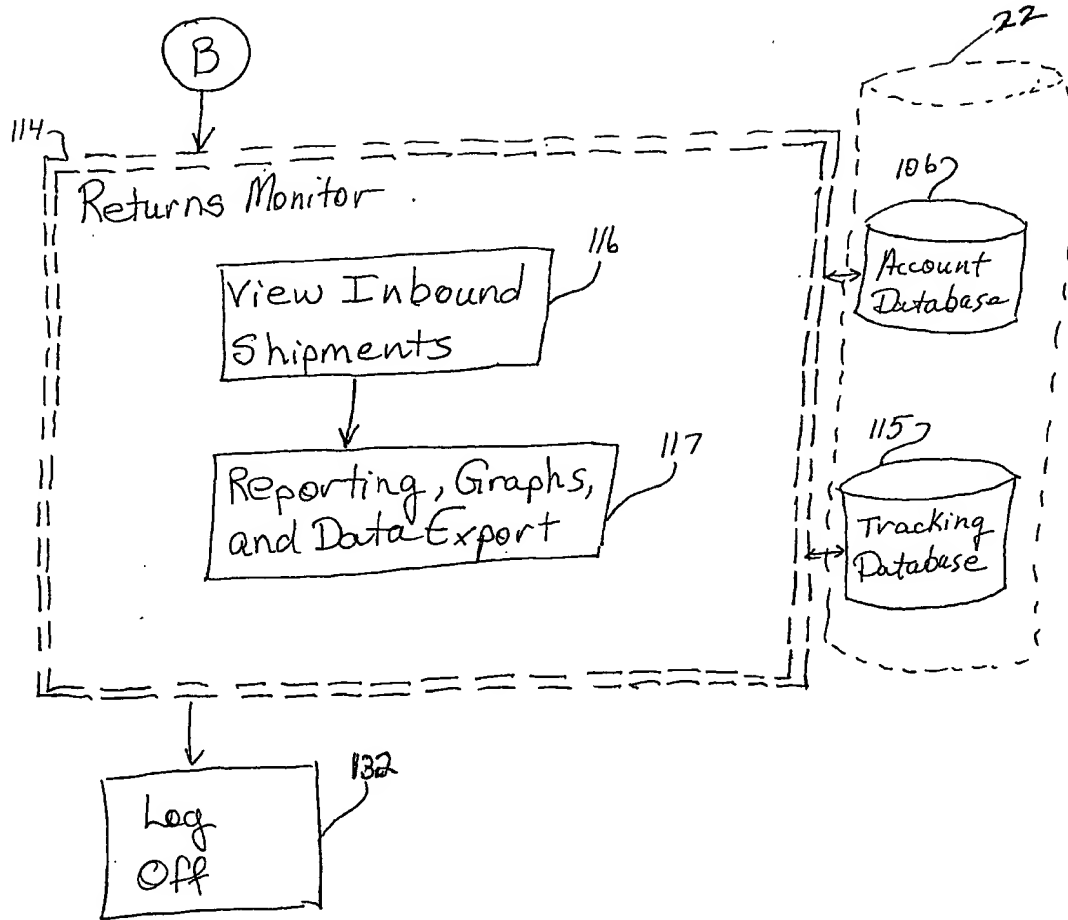
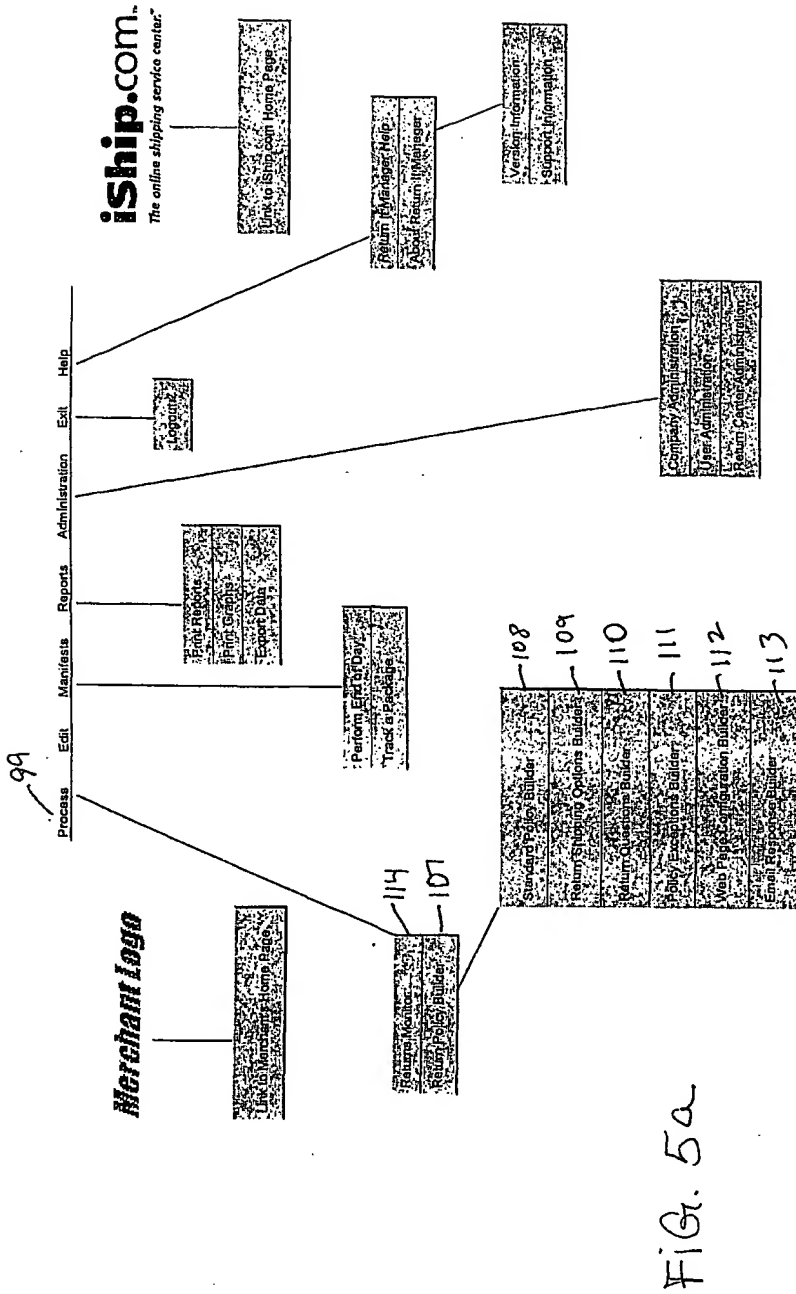


FIG. 4c



Returns Manager Menu Structure

FIG. 5a

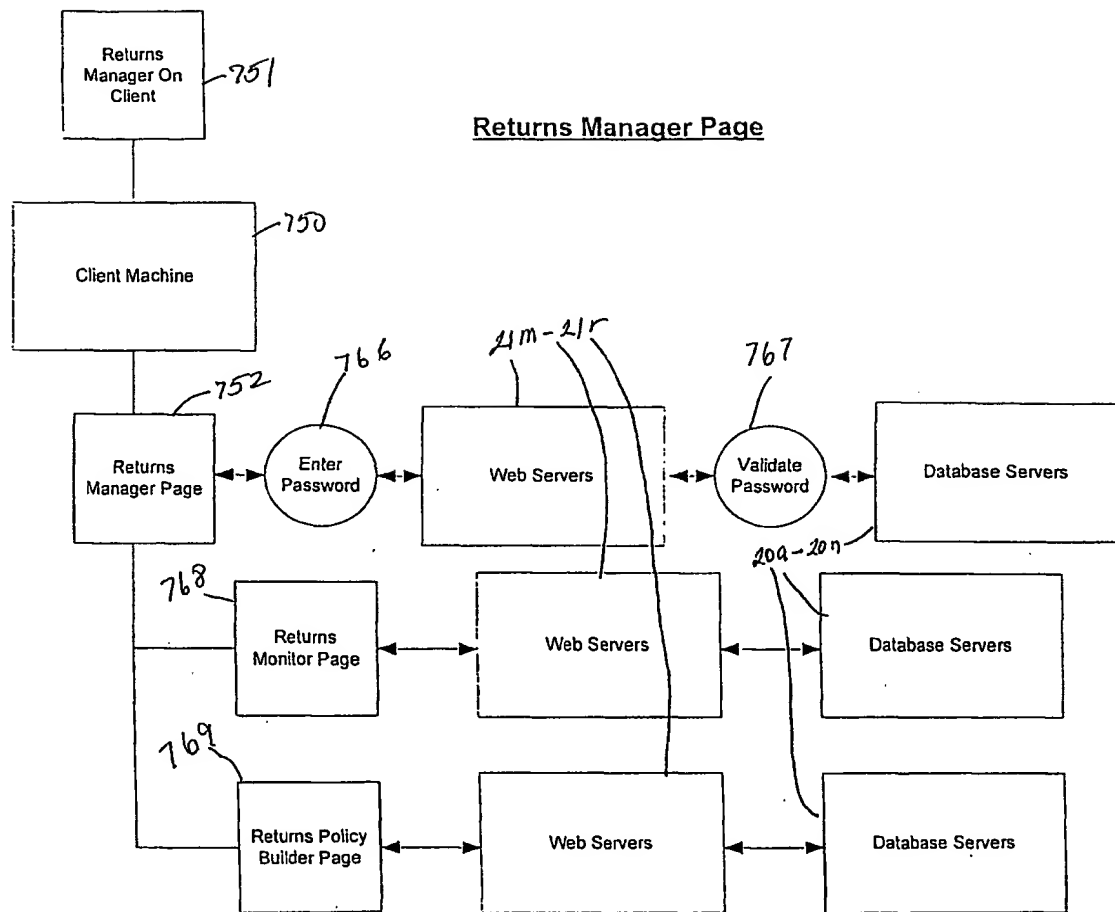


FIG. 5b

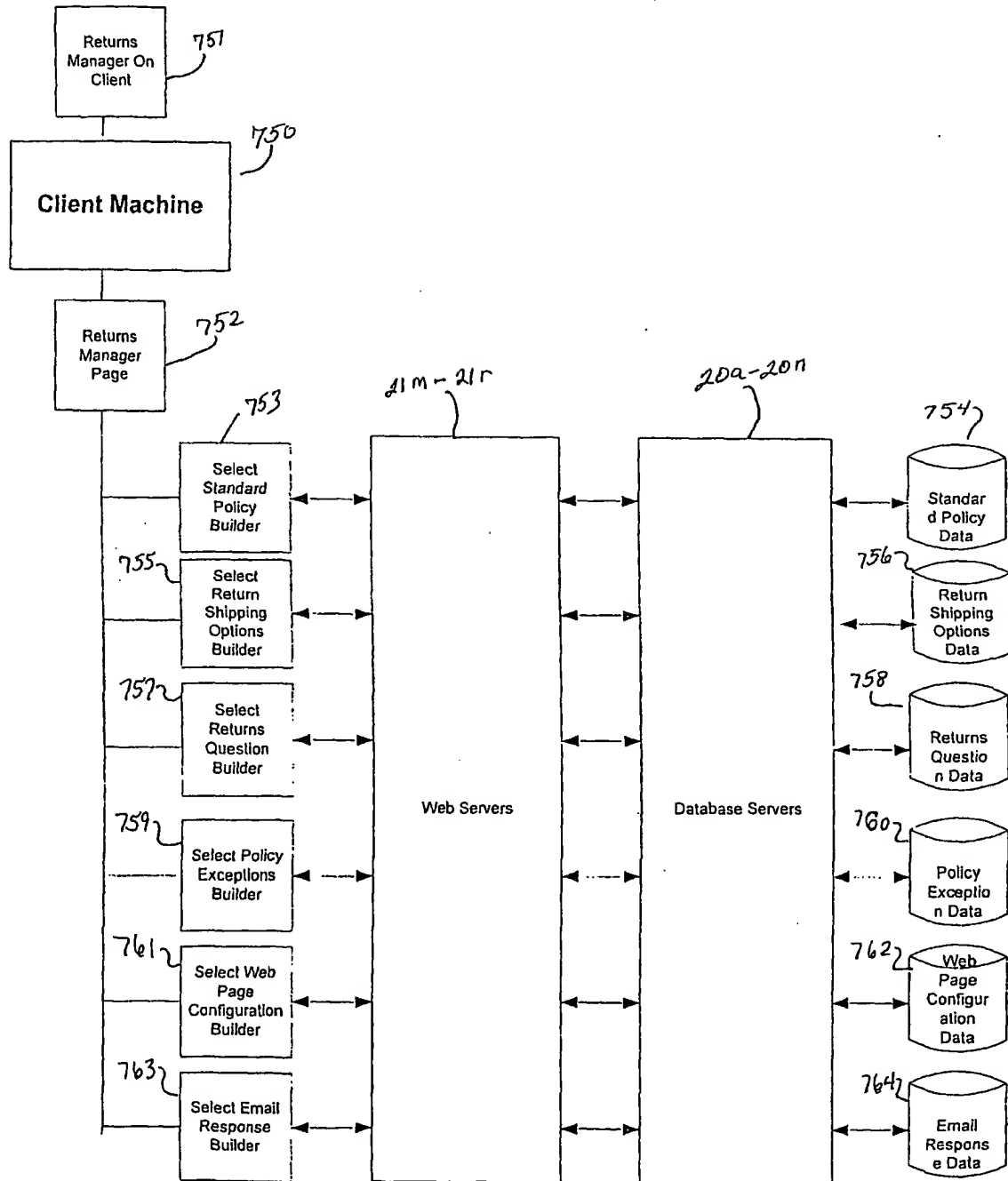
Returns Manager On Client

FIG. 50



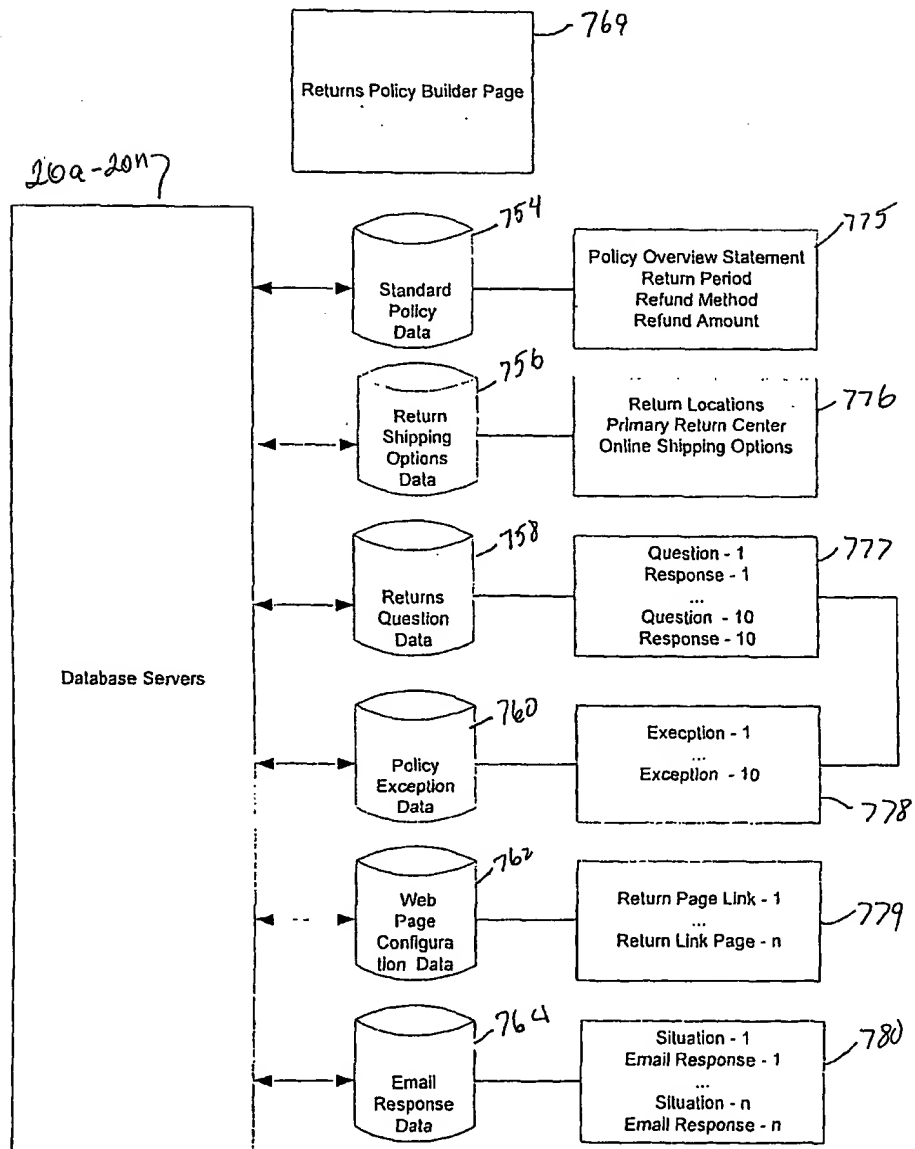
Database Table Representation

FIG. 5d

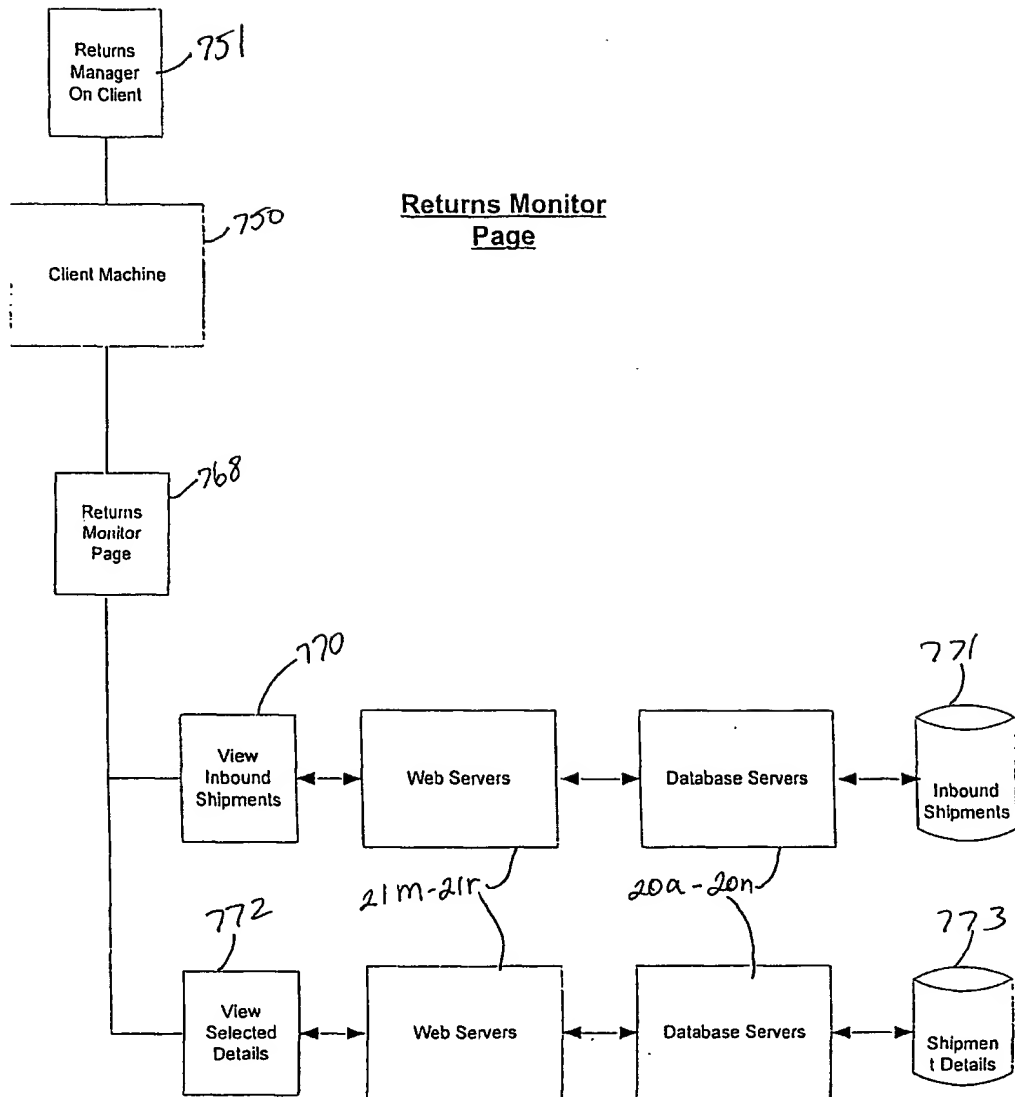


FIG. 5e

The image shows a screenshot of the iShip.com website's login interface. At the top left is the iShip.com logo with the tagline "Your Internet Package Shipper™". To the right is a "Log On to iShip" button with a circular icon. The main content area is a form with the following elements:

- A header section containing the text "Welcome to iShip.com" and "Type in your e-mail/User ID and Password and click on the Continue button." Handwritten annotations 120 and 121 point to this section.
- An "E-mail:" field containing the text "joesmith@merchant.com".
- A "Password:" field.
- A "Continue" button on the right side of the form, annotated with 122.
- A section for password recovery, starting with the text: "If you cannot remember your Password, please check your e-mail records for your Sign Up notification. If you are unable to find your notification, press the Recovery button and we will attempt to recover your Password." A "Recovery" button is located to the right of this text, annotated with 123-1 and 123-2.
- A section for joining or learning more, starting with the text: "If you would like to join iShip.com or learn more about using our shipping service, press 'Apply' or visit our Home Page and click on Take a Tour." An "Apply" button is located to the right of this text, annotated with 124-1 and 124-2.
- At the bottom of the form are two buttons: "Cancel" (annotated with 125) and "Help" (annotated with 126).

FIG. 6

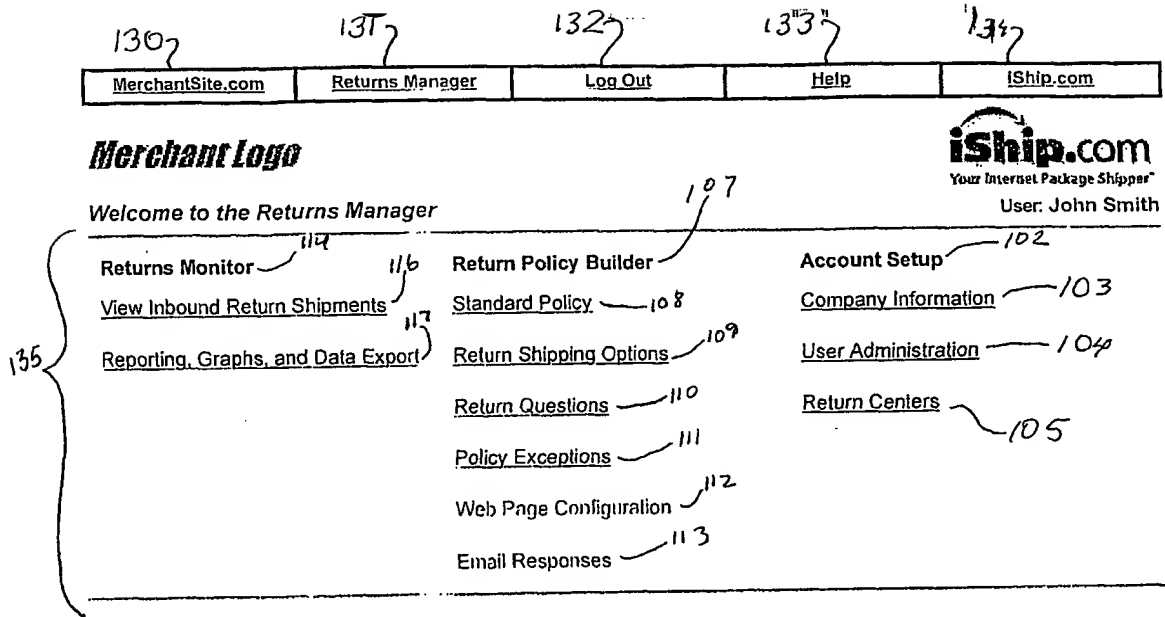


FIG. 7

<a href="#">MerchantSite.com</a>	<a href="#">Returns Manager</a>	<a href="#">Log Out</a>	<a href="#">Help</a>	<a href="#">iShip.com</a>
----------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------	---------------------------

***Merchant Logo***

***Company Information***

***iShip.com***  
Your Internet Package Shipper™  
User: John Smith

---

Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_ 140

Logo URL: \_\_\_\_\_ 141

Color Preference: \_\_\_\_\_ 142

Customer Service: email, phone number to be used as escape hatch for tricky responses \_\_\_\_\_ 143

---

FIG. 8

<a href="#">MerchantSite.com</a>	<a href="#">Returns Manager</a>	<a href="#">Log Out</a>	<a href="#">Help</a>	<a href="#">iShip.com</a>
----------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------	---------------------------

**Merchant Logo**

**User Administration**

**iShip.com**  
Your Internet Package Shipper™  
User: John Smith

User Names: 145

150 Access Privileges:

- Return Monitor: Warehouse Receiving Manager, Store Manager 146
- Return Policy Builder: Store Manager, Merchandise Manager 147
- Account Setup: Administrator (global) 148

Email, Phone Numbers 149

FIG. 9

<a href="#">MerchantSite.com</a>	<a href="#">Returns Manager</a>	<a href="#">Log Out</a>	<a href="#">Help</a>	<a href="#">iShip.com</a>
----------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------	---------------------------

**Merchant Logo****iShip.com**  
Your Internet Package Shipper™

User: John Smith

**Return Centers**

Add and edit Return Centers (where do return shipments go?)

- Center Name: — 151
- Attn: — 152
- Address 1, 2 — 153
- City, ST ZIP — 154
- Country — 155
- Tel Number — 156

Multiple centers may be configured. Import function for multiple stores (especially retail locations). Feeds ZIP-based retail store locator feature.

FIG. 10

MerchantSite.com	Returns Manager	Log Out	Help	iShip.com
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**Merchant Logo**
**iShip.com**  
 Your Internet Package Shipper™

User: John Smith

**Standard Policy**

Use this page to create and edit a consistent, automated returns policy for your online store. This is the general policy for the entire store – to configure exceptions to the policy at the category or item level, click here.

**Policy Overview Statement**

Summarize your store's overall returns policy. This text will appear at the beginning of the customer's returns process, and is an overview of the returns logic you will build. Best to keep it brief. Use HTML to format the text if you wish.

160-1 <B>Within 30 days of receipt of your shipment</B>, you may return:

160-3 <UL>

160-2 Any apparel, lawn & garden equipment, furniture, or books in original condition.

Any unopened CD, DVD, VHS tape, or software.

Any electronics merchandise or toy in new condition with its original packaging and accessories.

</UL>

We are unable to refund returned pharmaceuticals or food.

With few exceptions, we issue a <b>full refund</b> for the price of an item that meets these conditions. We only refund shipping costs if the item is a result of our error.

160-1 161-1 161-2

Preview

Return Window

Customers may return items for:

163 30 164 from 165 Receipt of Shipment 166

Refund Method 168

Customers may return items for:

169 Refund

170 Store Credit Only

171 Choice of Refund or Store Credit

Refund Amount 172

Refund amount will include:

173 Price of Item 176

174 Tax on Item 177

175 Original Shipping Charge

176 177

FIG. 11



MerchantSite.com	Returns Manager	Log Out	Help	iShip.com
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**Merchant Logo**

**iShip.com**  
Your Internet Package Shipper™  
User: John Smith

**Return Shipping Options**

Return Locations — 180

Where will you permit customers to return items?

☒ Online Only. 181

Customers can print a shipping label from your store and ship the package to a returns center.

Select primary return center: Returns Center, Ames IA 182 183

☒ Any retail store. 184

Customers can return items purchased online to convenient retail location.

Online Shipping Options — 185

Which online shipping options do you want to offer?

☒ Merchant pays. 186

Allow your company to pay return shipping costs for justified returns. Select carrier and service options:

187-1 ☒ UPS  
 187-2 ☒ UPS Ground  
 187-3 ☒ UPS 3 Day Select  
 187-4 ☒ UPS 2nd Day Air  
 187-5 ☒ UPS Next Day Air  
 188-1 ☒ US Postal Service  
 188-2 ☒ Priority Mail  
 188-3 ☒ Express Mail  
 189-1 ☒ FedEx  
 189-2 ☒ FedEx Standard Overnight  
 189-3 ☒ FedEx Priority Overnight  
 189-4 ☒ FedEx 2Day  
 189-5 ☒ FedEx Express Saver  
 190 ☒ Mail Boxes Etc.  
 191 ☒ Customer pays.

For unjustified returns, offer customers the convenience of paying for and printing a label during the return process.  
Select carrier options:

192 ☒ UPS  
 193 ☒ US Postal Service  
 194 ☒ FedEx  
 195 ☒ Mail Boxes Etc.

176   177

FIG. 12

MerchantSite.com	Returns Manager	Log Out	Help	iShip.com
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**Merchant Logo**

**Return Responses**

**iShip.com**  
Your Internet Package Shipper™  
User: John Smith

Create a series of questions to ask customers returning items, and define an appropriate response for each answer. To create a "no questions asked" policy, turn all questions off.

Question 1 — 200

☒ 201 On (enabled) ☐ 202 Off (disabled)

Question: Why are you returning this item? — 203

Ask: ☒ 204 About each item to be returned ☐ 205 Once per return

Answer Heading: You may return items for the following reasons: — 206

Answer Choices:

Incorrect Item Received — 207

Response:

We apologize for our error. We will issue a full refund for your item, and pay for shipping the correct item to you. — 208

☒ 210 Display Response

Follow Up: Issue Refund, Pay Return Shipping, Pay Replacement Shipping — 211-1, 211-2, 211-3

Edit Follow Up — 211-4, 213-1

Item Arrived Damaged or Defective — 212

We apologize for the problem with your shipment. — 213-2

☒ 214 Display Response

Follow Up: Ask Q2 — 215-1

Edit Follow Up — 215-2, 217-1

Customer Choice (Problem with Size, Co — 216

We apologize for the problem with your order. We will issue a full refund for your item. — 217-2

☒ 218 Display Response

Follow Up: Issue Refund, Do Not Pay For Shipping — 219-1, 219-2

Edit Follow Up — 219-3

FIG. 13a

21/109

21/109

Other (Please Specify)

We apologize for the problem with your order. We will issue a full refund for your item.

☒ Display Response

Follow Up: Issue Refund, Do Not Pay For Shipping

Edit Follow Up

Add/Remove Answer Choices

☒ Add customer comments field.

Question 2

☒ On (enabled) ☐ Off (disabled)

Question: Would you like a replacement for the item, or a refund?

Ask: ☒ About each item to be returned ☐ Once per return

Answer Heading:

Answer Choices:

Replacement

Response:

We apologize for the problem with your order. We will send a replacement immediately.

☒ Display Response

Follow Up: Do Not Issue Refund, Pay Return Shipping, Pay Replacement Shipping

Edit Follow Up

Refund

We apologize for the problem with your order. We will issue a full refund for your item.

☒ Display Response

Follow Up: Issue Refund, Pay Return Shipping

Edit Follow Up

Add/Remove Answer Choices

☒ Add customer comments field.

FIG. 13b

Question 3 — 231

☐ On (enabled) ☒ Off (disabled)

Question:

Ask: ☒ About each item to be returned ☐ Once per return

Answer Heading:

Answer Choices:

Replacement

Response:

☐ Display Response

Follow Up:

[Edit Follow Up](#)[Add/Remove Answer Choices](#)☒ Add customer comments field.

Question 4 — 232

☐ On (enabled) ☒ Off (disabled)

Question:

Ask: ☒ About each item to be returned ☐ Once per return

Answer Heading:

Answer Choices:

Replacement

Response:

☐ Display Response

Follow Up:

[Edit Follow Up](#)[Add/Remove Answer Choices](#)☒ Add customer comments field.

FIG. 13c

Question 5 <sup>233</sup>☐ On (enabled) ☒ Off (disabled)

Question:

Ask: ☒ About each item to be returned ☐ Once per return

Answer Heading:

Answer Choices:

Replacement

Response:

☐ Display Response

Follow Up:

[Edit Follow Up](#)[Add/Remove Answer Choices](#)☒ Add customer comments field.<sup>126</sup>  
Cancel<sup>177</sup>  
Save

FIG. 13d

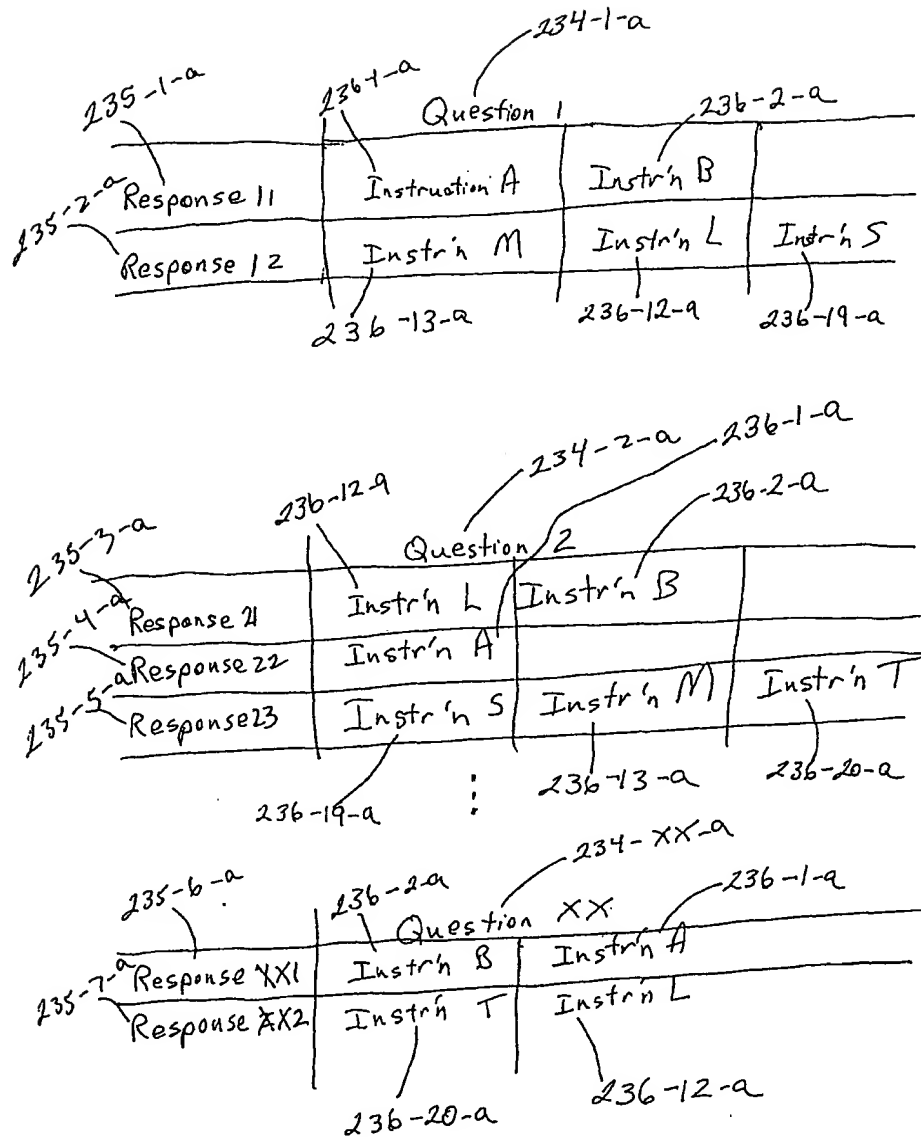


FIG. 13e

A hand-drawn diagram of a table titled "Question Table". The table has two columns and multiple rows. The rows are labeled on the left with handwritten text: "Question 1", "Question 2", ":", "Question n", ":", and "Question xx". The corresponding cells in the second column are labeled "Question text 1", "Question text 2", ":", "Question text n", ":", and "Question text xx". Handwritten annotations with arrows point to specific parts of the table: "234-1-a" points to the first row, "234-2-a" points to the second row, "234-2-b" points to the title, "234-1-b" points to the first column, "234-n-b" points to the row labeled ":", "234-n-a" points to the row labeled "Question n", "234-xx-b" points to the row labeled ":", and "234-xx-a" points to the row labeled "Question xx".

Question Table	
Question 1	Question text 1
Question 2	Question text 2
:	:
Question n	Question text n
:	:
Question xx	Question text xx

FIG. 13f

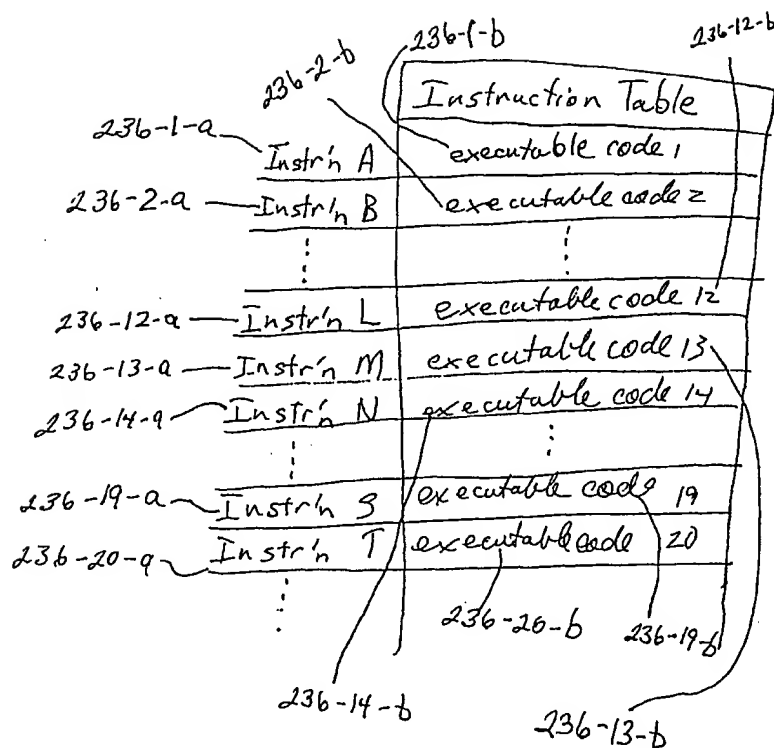


FIG. 13g



Response Table	
235-1-a Response 11	Response 11 text 235-1-b
235-2-a Response 12	Response 12 text 235-2-b
⋮	⋮
235-3-a Response 21	Response 21 text 235-3-b
⋮	⋮
235-6-a Response xx1	Response xx1 text 235-6-b
Response xx2	Response xx2 text 235-7-b
235-7-a ⋮	⋮

FIG. 13h

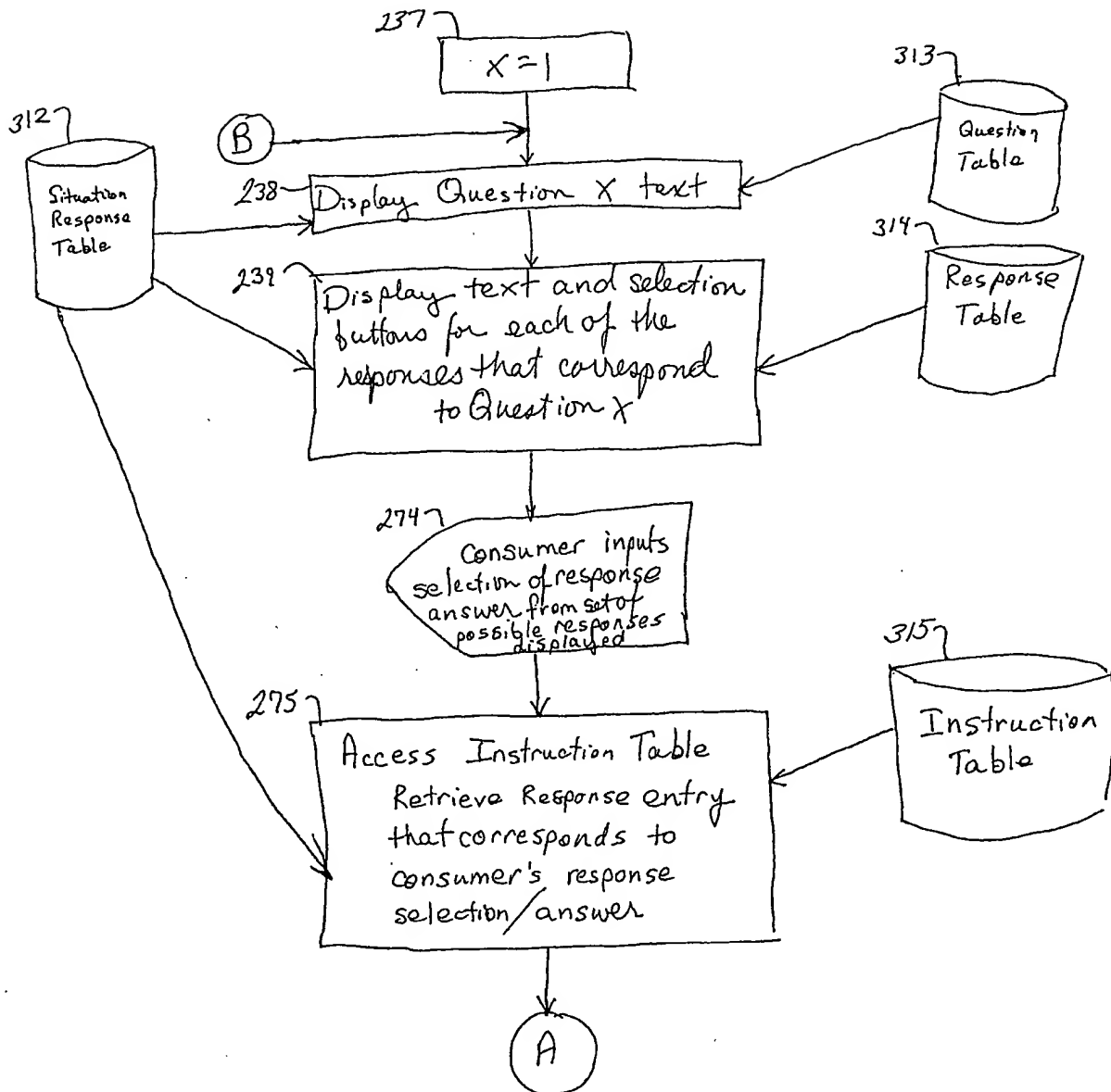


FIG. 132-1

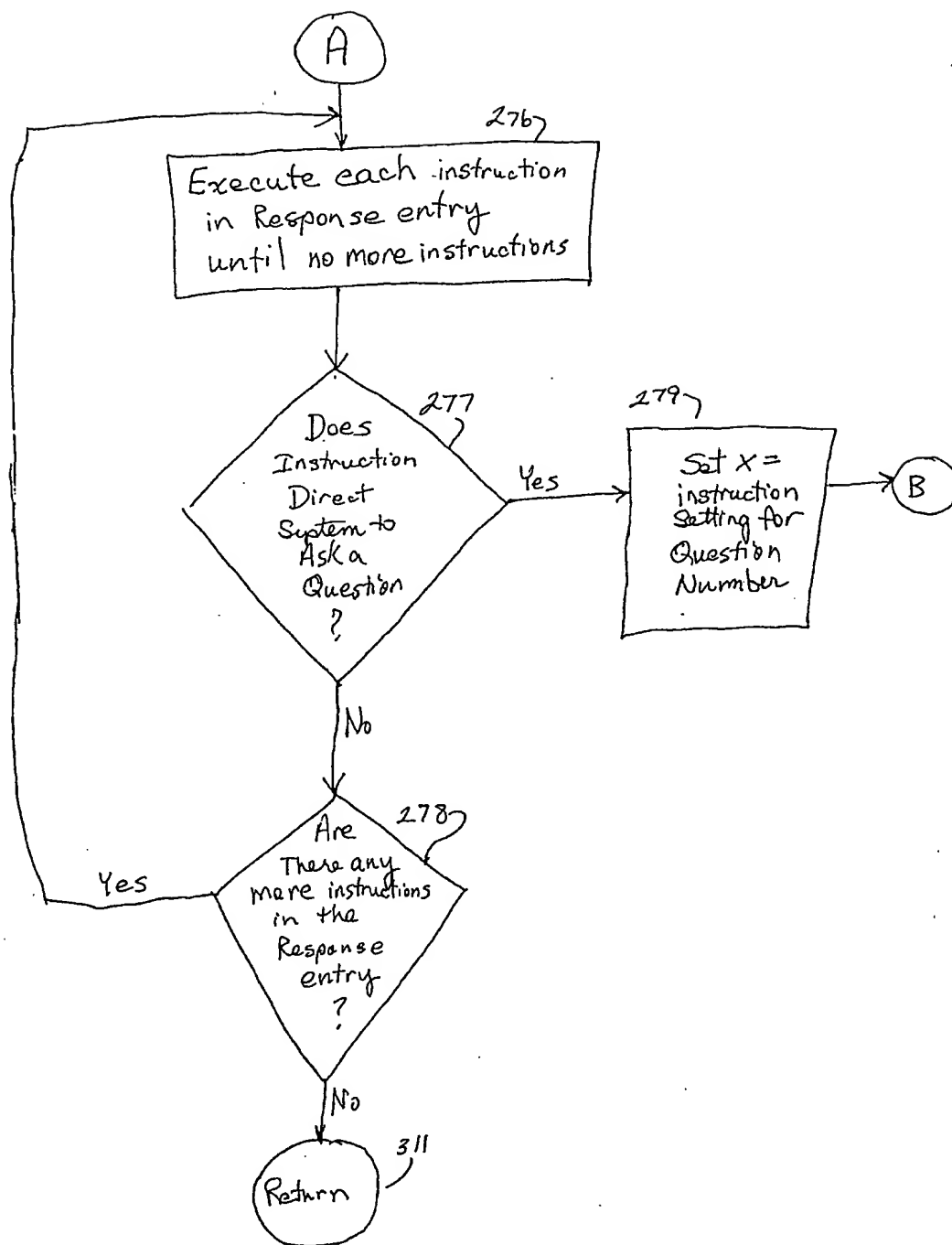


FIG. 13i-2

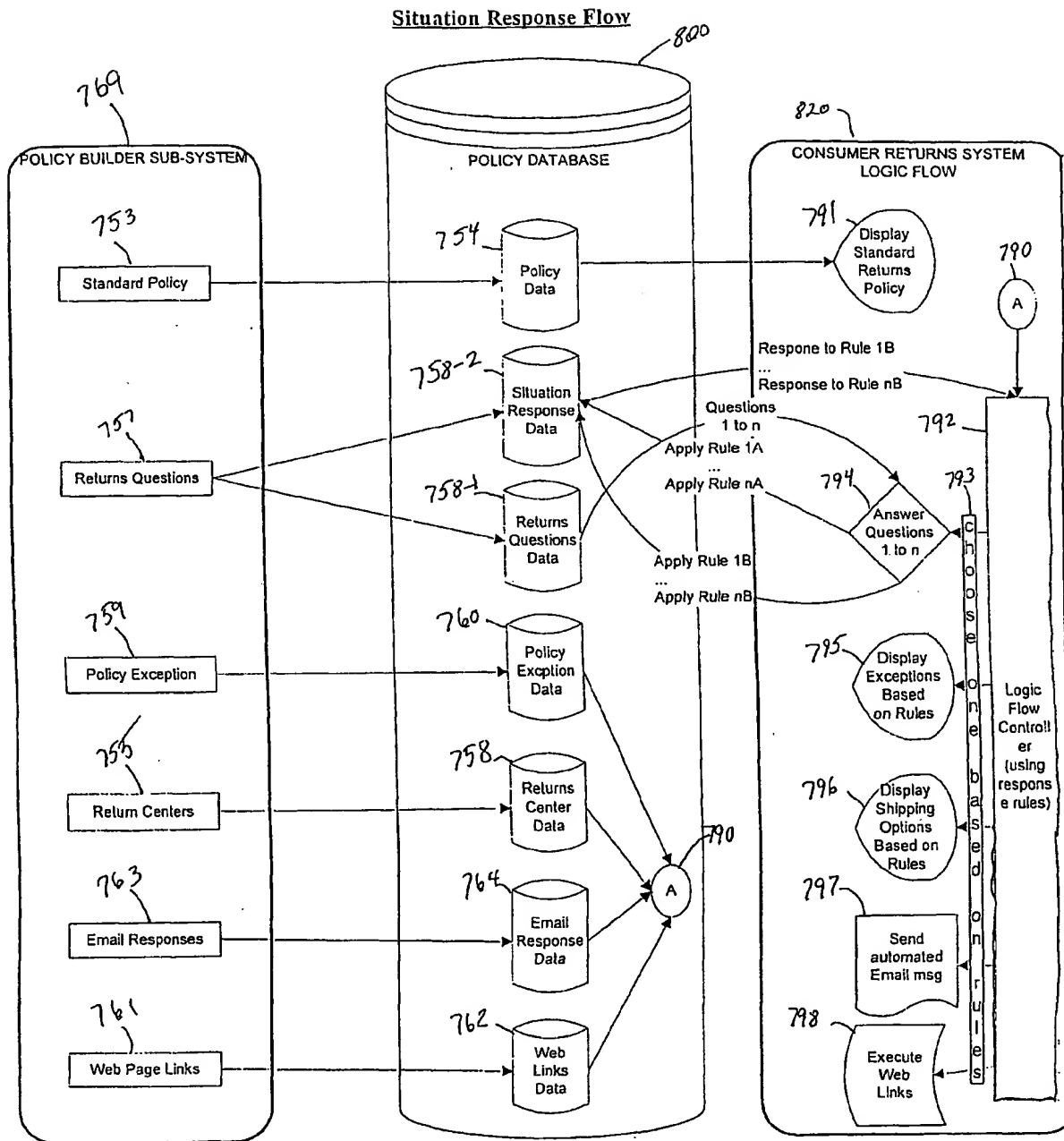


FIG. 13j

MerchantSite.com	Returns Manager	Log Out	Help	iShip.com
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**Merchant Logo**

**Follow-Up Actions**

**iShip.com**  
Your Internet Package Shipper™  
User: John Smith

Create follow-up actions for each return response.

Authorized? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undetermined

Issue refund: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undetermined

Justified? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undetermined

Pay for return shipping: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undetermined

Replacement? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undetermined

Pay for replacement shipping: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Undetermined

Notify Customer Service? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other Email:

Notify customer service rep. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other Email:

Ask Additional Questions? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other Email:

Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4 Q5 Q6 Q7 Q8 Q9 Q10

FIG. 14

<a href="#">MerchantSite.com</a>	<a href="#">Returns Manager</a>	<a href="#">Log Out</a>	<a href="#">Help</a>	<a href="#">iShip.com</a>
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**Merchant Logo**

**Policy Exceptions**

**iShip.com**  
Your Internet Package Shipper  
User: John Smith

Category and Item exceptions to standard return policy. Special treatment of categories or items that:

- Cannot be returned for refund for any reason. Triggers an automatic "unjustified" response.  
*"We're sorry, we do not except returns of pharmaceuticals, food, and opened underwear."*
- Have special criteria that must be met before returns are allowed. Triggers additional qualifying questions.  
*"Have you opened the package?"*
- Have specialty shipping criteria.  
*"We accept furniture returns, but do not pay return shipping for any reason."*

Exception Categories ~ 271

Exception Items ~ 272

Also Customer exceptions for top-tier customers that deserve special treatment.

273

FIG. 15

<a href="#">MerchantSite.com</a>	<a href="#">Returns Manager</a>	<a href="#">Log Out</a>	<a href="#">Help</a>	<a href="#">iShip.com</a>
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**Merchant Logo****iShip.com**

Your Internet Package Shipper™

User: John Smith

**Exception Categories**

280 { Exception categories are used to define special return processing certain groups of items. Store categories are generally the departments in your store. If you always have the same return policy for every item in your store, you do not need to create categories. If you do treat some items differently than others, you need categories.

For example, your store may accept return of any apparel merchandise, except opened packages of underwear. You would use categories to except opened underwear from your standard policy.

**Main Categories (Level One)**

281 Apparel	282 Furniture	283 Food	284 Pharmaceuticals
285 Audio CDs	286 Lawn & Garden	287 Books	288 Computer Hardware
289 Electronics	290 Video DVD	291 Video Tape	292 Computer Software
293 Toys	294	295	296
297	298	299	300
	176	301	

Cancel &lt;&lt;

Next Step &gt;&gt;

FIG. 16

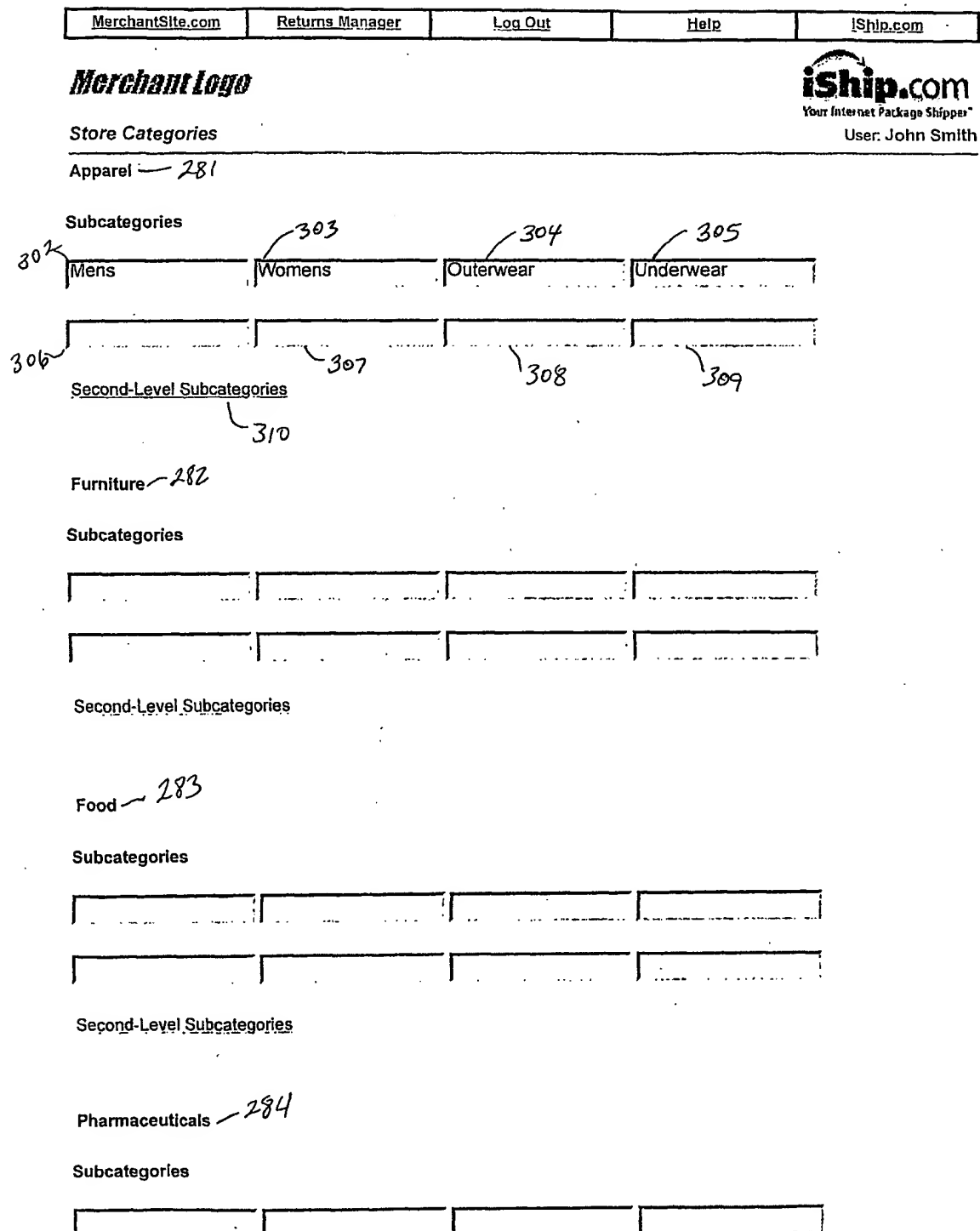


FIG. 17a



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Second-Level Subcategories

Category Name

Subcategories


Second-Level Subcategories

176

Cancel

Save

177

FIG. 17b

<a href="#">MerchantSite.com</a>	<a href="#">Returns Manager</a>	<a href="#">Log Out</a>	<a href="#">Help</a>	<a href="#">iShip.com</a>
----------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------	---------------------------

**Merchant Logo**

**iShip.com**  
Your Internet Package Shipper  
User: John Smith

**Web Page Configuration**

Set up pages hosted by iShip.com.

AFF.URL :	<input type="text" value="http://www.iship.com"/>	320
AFF.CANCELURL :	<input type="text" value="http://www.pufferfish.com/affdemo/index.htm"/>	321
AFF.DONEURL :	<input type="text" value="http://www.pufferfish.com/affdemo/index.htm"/>	322
AFF.TITLEFONTFACE :	<input type="text" value="Arial, Helvetica"/>	323
AFF.FONTFACE :	<input type="text" value="Arial, Helvetica"/>	324
AFF.PAGEBGCOLOR :	<input type="text" value="#FFFFFF"/>	325
AFF.SHADECOLOR :	<input type="text" value="#FFFFFF"/>	326
AFF.TITLEBARCOLOR :	<input type="text" value="#7093DB"/>	327
AFF.TITLEFONTCOLOR :	<input type="text" value="#FFFF00"/>	328
AFF.HOVERTEXT :	<input type="text" value="Partners Are Cool"/>	329
AFF.IMAGENAME :	<input type="text" value="http://marketing.iship.com/graphics/partnerlogo.gif"/>	330
AFF.IMAGETEXT :	<input type="text" value="Partner.com - Where Partners Partner for Business"/>	331
AFF.SITETEXT :	<input type="text" value="Where Partners Partner for Business"/>	332
AFF.USERID :	<input type="text" value="(not defined)"/>	333
AFF.PASSWORD :	<input type="text" value="(not defined)"/>	334
AFF.HEADERHTML :	<input type="text" value="(not defined)"/>	335
		336-1
		336-2
AFF.FOOTERHTML :	<input type="text" value="(not defined)"/>	337
		338-1

Fig. 18a

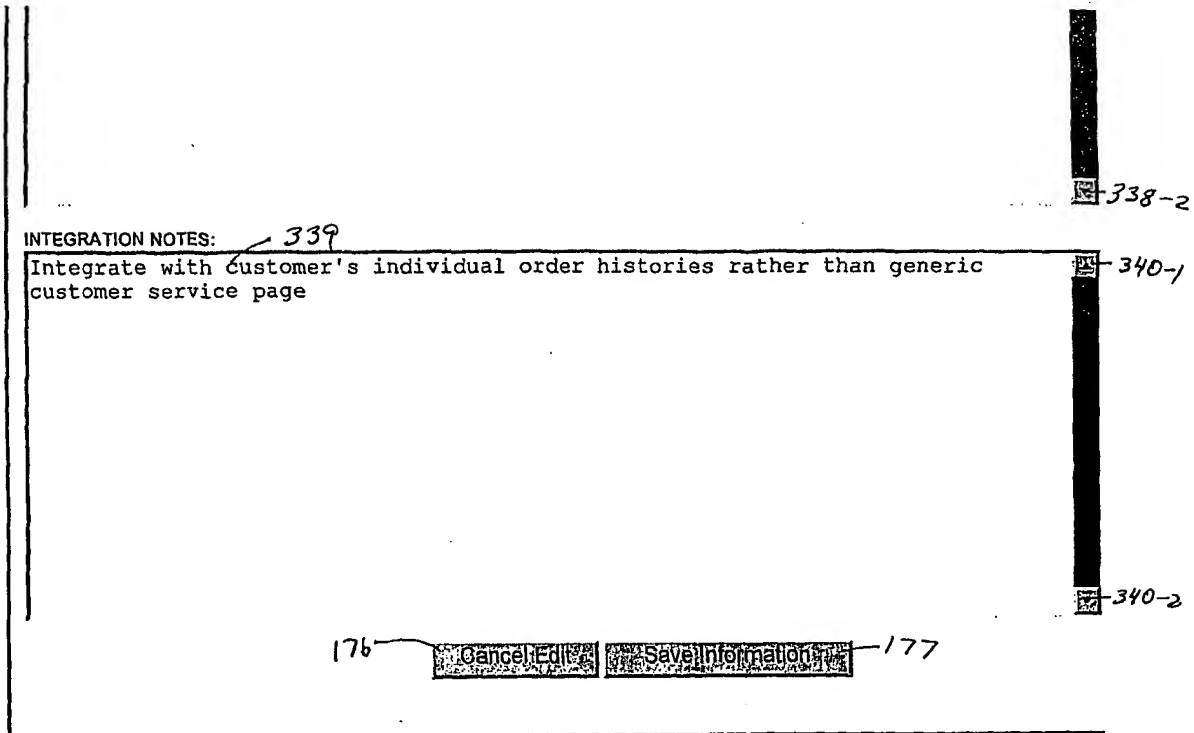


FIG. 18b

<a href="#">MerchantSite.com</a>	<a href="#">Returns Manager</a>	<a href="#">Log Out</a>	<a href="#">Help</a>	<a href="#">iShip.com</a>
----------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------	---------------------------

**Merchant Logo**

**iShip.com**  
 Your Internet Package Shipper™  
 User: John Smith

**Email Responses**

Edit and preview emails sent to:

- **Customer:** edit text
  - on shipment of return package
  - on receipt of return package
- **Merchant (optional):** email sent on shipment. Change:
  - routing: primary recipient(s), cc, and bcc. Can include routing to customer service for logging into CRM software (Siebel, Remedy, etc), shipping dock managers, other logistics or operations managers.
  - subject line: set to include key IDs: RMA #, customer #, order #, SKU, etc.
  - body text

FIG. 19

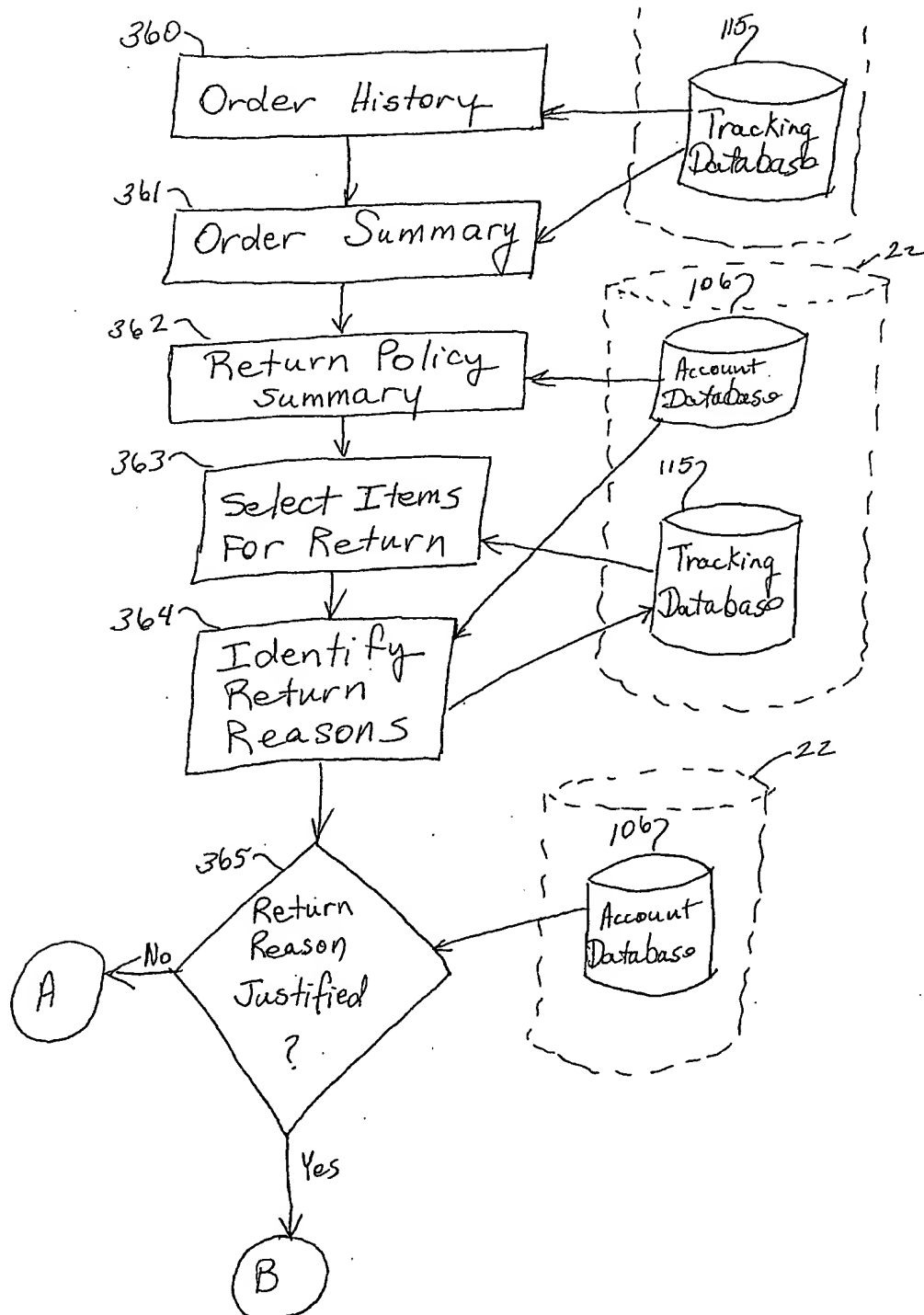


FIG. 20a

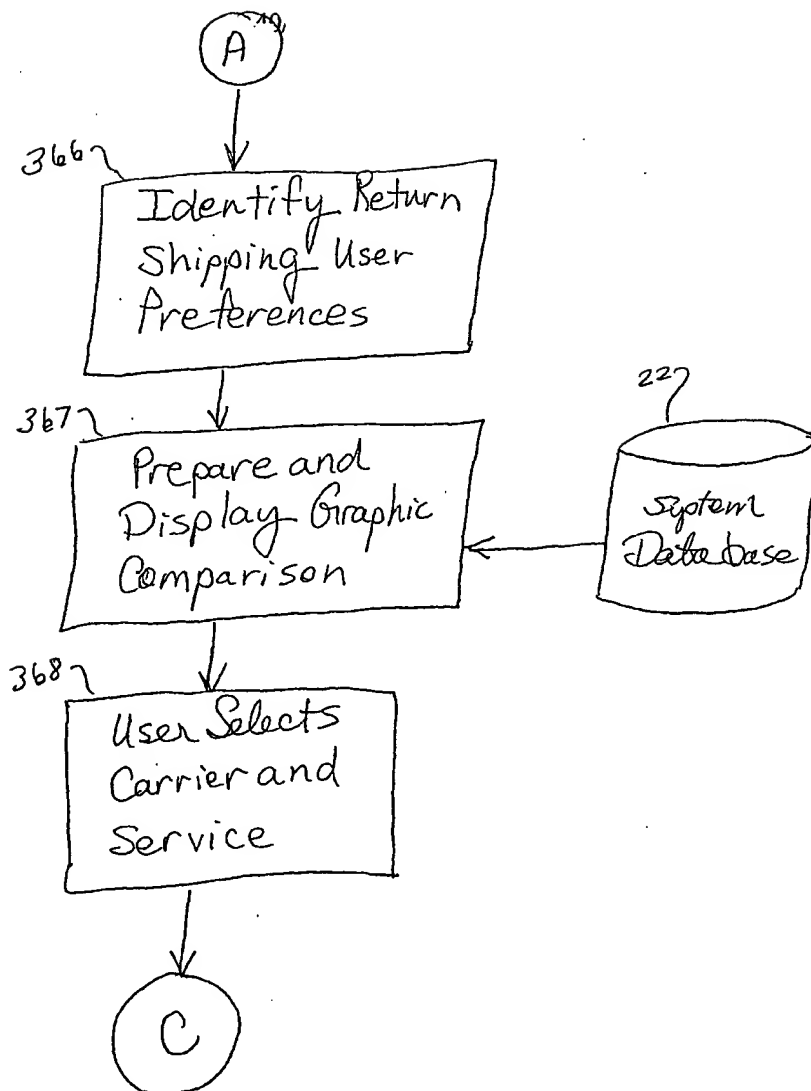


FIG. 20b

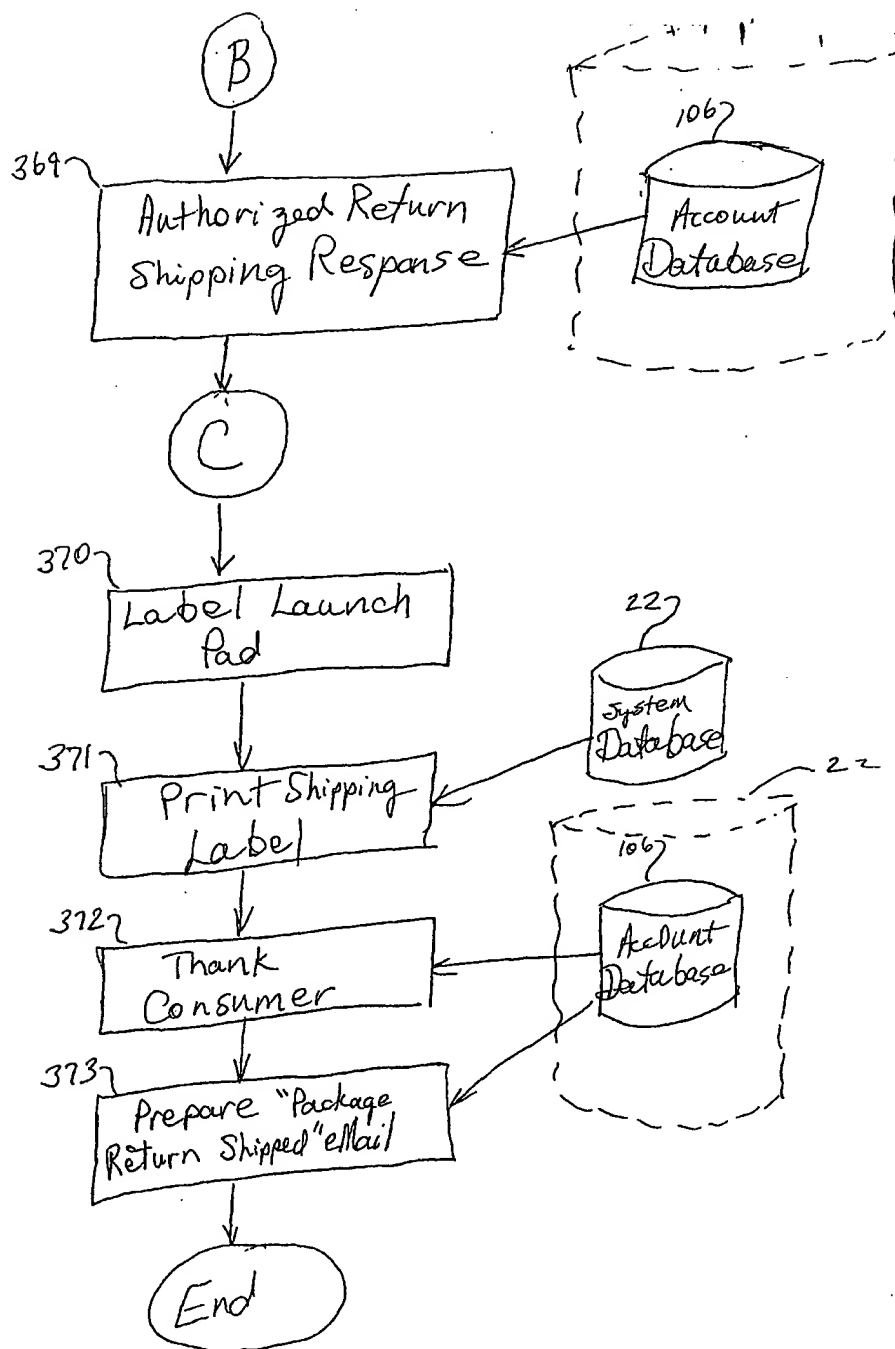


FIG. 20c

**Merchant Logo****Merchant Main Menu Choices****Your Order History**

Click on an order to view the order summary.

Merchant

400

SubMenu

Selections

Shipped Orders:			
	Order #	Order Date	Status
401-1	<u>002-0152586-5576810</u>	July 19, 1999	All items shipped
401-2	<u>002-2212571-6739814</u>	March 28, 1999	All items shipped
401-3	<u>002-9739895-6708638</u>	January 30, 1999	All items shipped
401-4	<u>002-1894644-6936263</u>	January 14, 1999	All items shipped
401-5	<u>002-7643906-5558259</u>	December 14, 1998	All items shipped
401-6	<u>002-6790950-3739847</u>	October 29, 1998	All items shipped
401-7	<u>002-3632396-2353407</u>	April 13, 1998	All items shipped

[Return to Account Maintenance Main Page](#)

FIG. 21



## Merchant Logo

## Merchant Main Menu Choices

Order Summary 401-1 [Return to Your Order History](#)

**Order#:** 002-0152586-5576810  
**Date:** July 19, 1999 at 09:58 AM PDT 407  
**Status:** All items shipped

**Shipping Address:**  
 Scott J. Bean  
 iShip.com  
 2515 - 140th Ave NE Suite E-110  
 Bellevue, WA 98005 USA  
 425.602.5022

**Returns? Click Here:**  
[Return services by iShip.com](#)

**iShip.com**  
 Your Internet Package Shipper

**Ship Method:**  
 Standard Shipping

**Number of Shipments:** **Payment Method:**  
 One shipment when complete Visa  
 order is ready Last 5 digits: 26781

Merchant

SubMenu

Selections

	<b>Items Ordered:</b>	<b>Price:</b>
404-1	1 of: <u>Permission Marketing : Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers</u> [Audio Cassette] By: Seth Godin(Reader) 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority.	\$14.40
404-2	1 of: <u>Yenb, It's That Easy</u> [ECD] [Audio CD] By: G. Love & Special Sauce 1 shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via US First Class.	\$12.99
404-3	1 of: <u>For Those About To Rock We Salute You</u> [ORIGINAL RECORDING REMASTERED] [Audio CD] By: AC/DC 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority.	\$11.49
404-4	1 of: <u>Qutelay</u> [Audio CD] By: Beck 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority.	\$12.99
404-5	1 of: <u>Natty Dread</u> [Audio CD] By: Charlie Hunter Quartet 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority.	\$12.99
404-6	1 of: <u>Duo</u> [Audio CD] By: Charlie Hunter, Leon Parker 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority.	\$12.99
404-7	1 of: <u>RCA WSP150 900MHz Wireless Speakers</u> [Electronics] By: RCA 1 shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via UPS Ground. Track your package with iShip.com	\$149.95

Item(s) Subtotal: \$227.80  
 Shipping & Handling: \$19.56  
 Total Before Tax: \$247.36  
 Tax: \$21.29  
**TOTAL: \$268.65**

[Return to Your Order History](#)

[Top of Page](#)

FIG. 22

## Merchant Logo

## Merchant Main Menu Choices

Return Service[Return to Your Order History](#)

Within 30 days of receipt of your shipment, you may return:

- Any book in original condition.
- Any unopened CD, DVD, VHS tape, or software.
- Any electronics merchandise or toy in new condition with its original packaging and accessories.

We will issue a full refund for the price of any item that meets these conditions. We only refund shipping costs if the item is a result of our error.

**Order#:** 002-0152586-5576810  
**Date:** July 19, 1999 at 09:58 AM PDT  
**Status:** All items shipped

## Select the items you would like to return:

Price:

- 421-1 ☐ 1 of: Permission Marketing : Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers [Audio Cassette]  
 By: Seth Godin(Reader)  
 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$14.40
- 421-2 ☐ 1 of: Yeah, It's That Easy [ECD] [Audio CD]  
 By: G. Love & Special Sauce  
 1 shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via US First Class. \$12.99
- 421-3 ☐ 1 of: For Those About To Rock We Salute You [ORIGINAL RECORDING]  
 REMASTERED [Audio CD]  
 By: AC/DC  
 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$11.49
- 421-4 ☐ 1 of: Odelay [Audio CD]  
 By: Beck  
 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$12.99
- 421-5 ☐ 1 of: Natty Dread [Audio CD]  
 By: Charlie Hunter Quartet  
 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$12.99
- 421-6 ☐ 1 of: Duo [Audio CD]  
 By: Charlie Hunter, Leon Parker  
 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$12.99
- 421-7 ☒ 1 of: RCA WSP150 900MHz Wireless Speakers [Electronics]  
 By: RCA  
 1 shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via UPS Ground.  
 Track your package with iShip.com \$149.95

Item(s) Subtotal: \$227.80  
 Shipping & Handling: \$19.56  
 Total Before Tax: \$247.36  
 Tax: \$21.29  
 TOTAL: \$268.65

Next Step &gt;&gt;

[Return to Your Order History](#)[Top of Page](#)

FIG. 23a

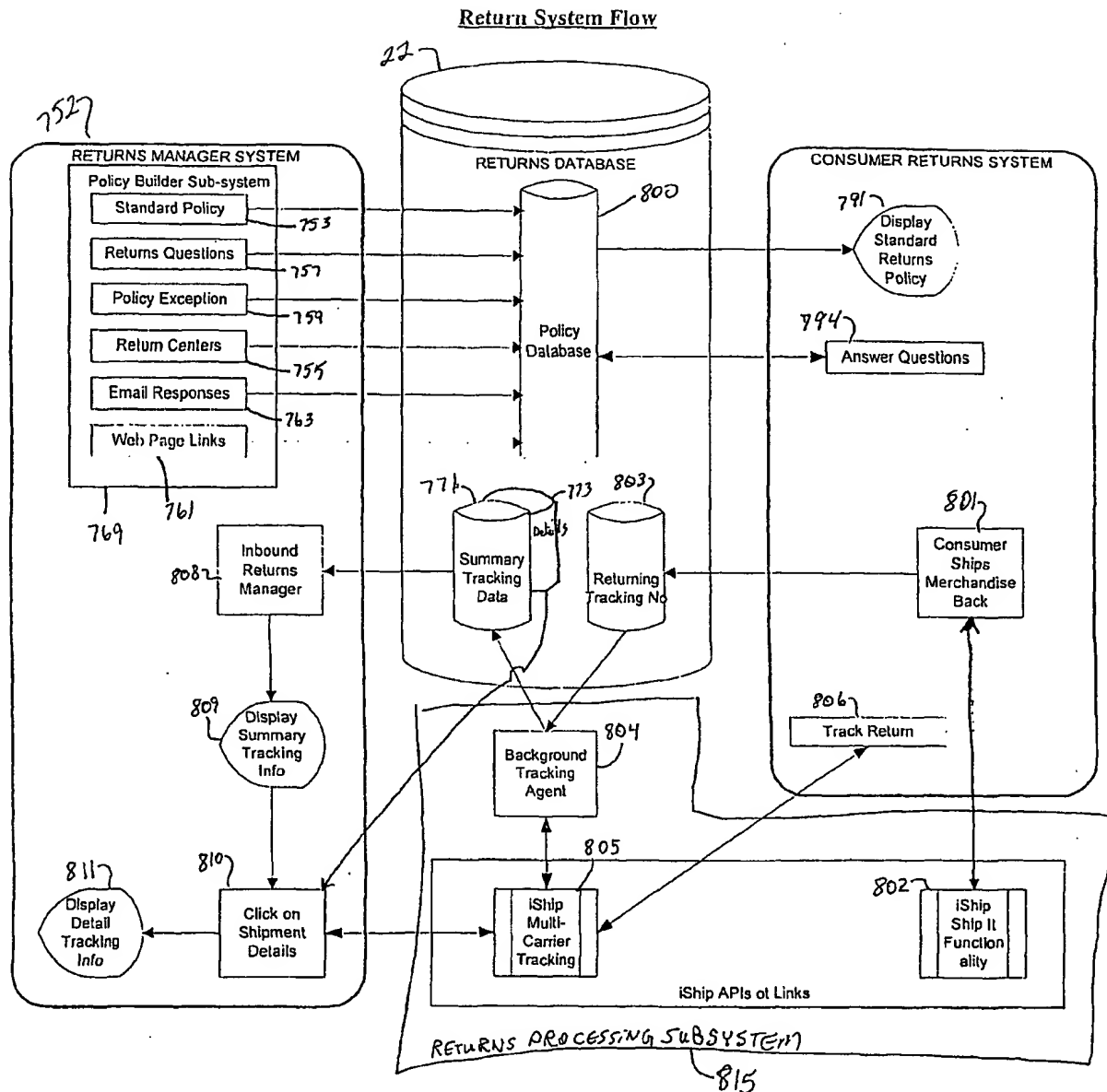


FIG. 23b

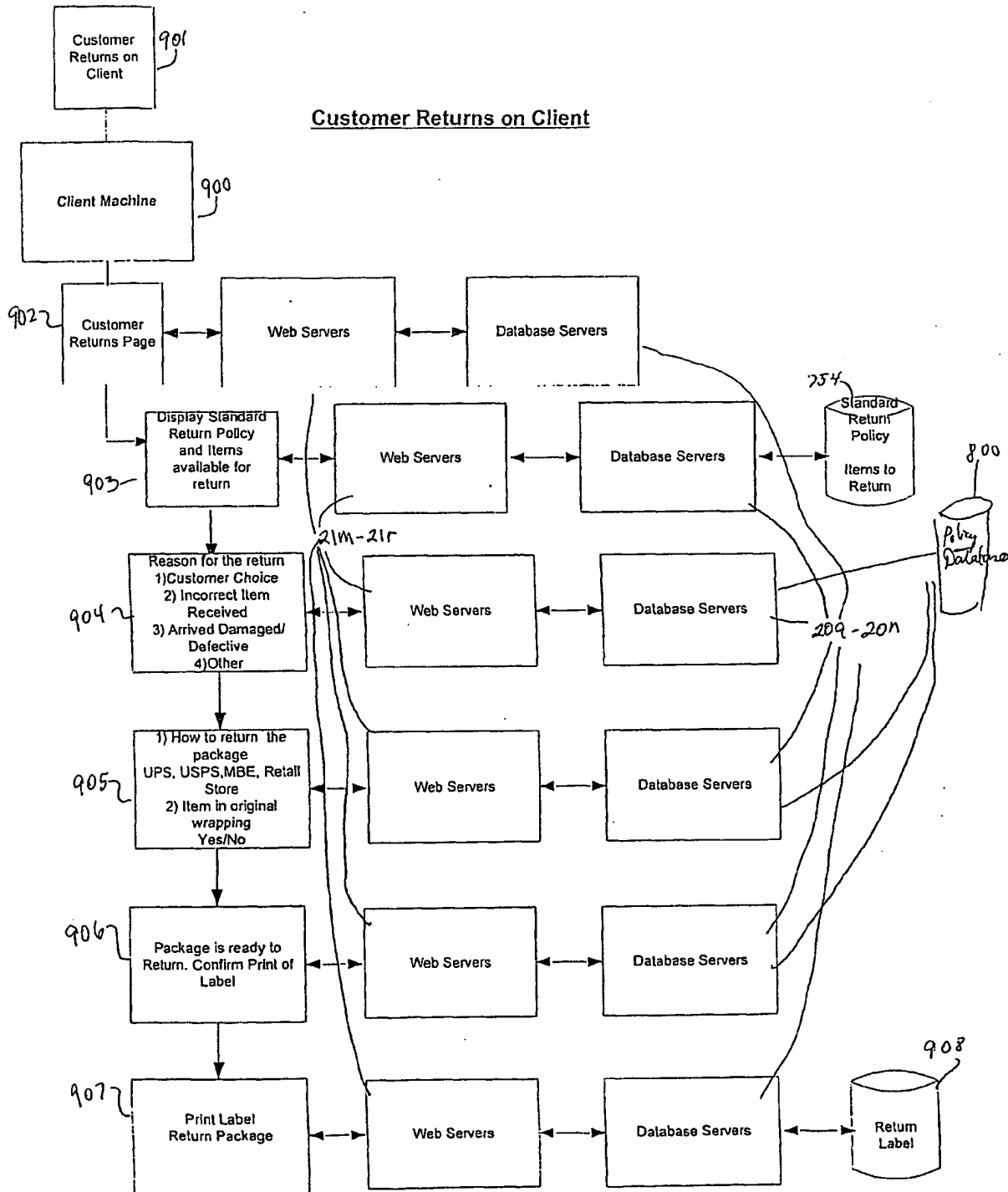


FIG. 23c

## Merchant Logo

## Merchant Main Menu Choices

Returns Service Return to Your Order History

**Order#:** 002-0152586-5576810 401-1

**Date:** July 19, 1999 at 09:58 AM PDT

**Status:** All items shipped

**Items to Return:** **Price:**

421-7 ☒ 1 of: RCA WSP150900MHz Wireless Speakers [Electronics] \$149.95 — 173

404-7 ☒ By: RCA

405 ☒ shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via UPS Ground.

☒ Track your package with iShip.com

Item(s) Subtotal Before Tax: \$149.95 — 173

Refunded Tax: \$12.90 — 174

**TOTAL:** \$162.85 — 172

**Reason for return:** 206

427-1 ☐ Customer Choice — 216

427-2 ☐ Incorrect Item Received — 207

427-3 ☐ Arrived Damaged/Defective — 212

427-4 ☐ Other (please specify below): — 220

Right speaker does not receive signal. 425

☒ 426-1

☒ 426-2

**Next Step >>** 422

406

Return to Your Order History

Top of Page

FIG. 24

## Merchant Logo

## Merchant Main Menu Choices

Merchant

SubMenu

Selections

Returns Service Return to Your Order History

**Returning Your Package:****Price:**

We apologize for the problem with your order. To process your refund, make sure your item(s) are in the original packaging and prepared for safe shipment.

\$149.95 — 173

413-1 { 1 of: RCA WSP150 900MHz Wireless Speakers [Electronics]  
 404-1 { By: RCA  
 Reason for return: Arrived Damaged or Defective — 212  
 Comments: Right speaker does not receive signal. — 425

TOTAL REFUND: \$162.85 — 172

Through our partnership with iShip.com, you can print a return label directly from your computer or take your package to a Mail Boxes Etc. To print a shipping label, you must have a printer that prints 300 dpi or better.

430 How would you like to return the package? (Select One)

431-1 ☒ 187-1 UPS ☐ 188-1 US Postal Service ☐ 190 Mail Boxes Etc. ☐ 184 Retail Store

432 Is your item packaged in the original shipping box?

433 ☒ Yes ☐ No  
 434

**Next Step >>** — 422

406  
Return to Your Order History

Top of Page

FIG. 25

**Merchant Logo****Merchant Main Menu Choices**Returns ServiceReturn to Your Order History**Returning Your Package:**

440 ~ Your returns package is ready to ship to the Amazon.com Returns Center.

441 ~ To create a UPS label for this package, click the Next Step button.

Merchant

**Next Step >>**

SubMenu


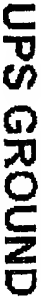
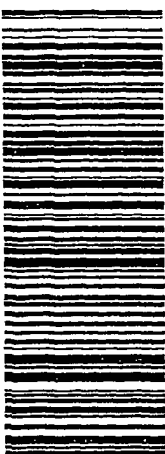
40b  
Return to Your Order History

Selections

Top of Page

FIG. 26

450

SCOTT BEAN (424) 502-5022 5TH FLOOR 3835 FACTORIA BLVD SE BELLEVUE WA 98006		<b>11 LBS 1 OF 1</b>	
SHIP ELECTRONICS RETURNS DEPARTMENT - (234) 234-2345 TO: AMAZON.COM 1122 JIMMY SWACA BLVD WILMINGTON DE 19803		(420) SHIP TO POSTAL CODE  (420) 19803	
 TRACKING # 1Z 345 321 03 0002 8462			
REF #1: Return wireless audio speakers		ISH 1.00	

PRINT THIS LABEL NOW

451

**DO NOT PHOTOCOPY**

Using a photocopy could delay the delivery of your package and will result in additional shipping charges

To prepare your package for shipment, you need to do the following:

1. Use the Print button in your browser to print this page to your laser printer.
2. Fold the printed page in half and use as the shipping label.
3. Affix the shipping label to your package so that the entire label is visible.

Click here to return to:

**Merchant Logo**  
*website*

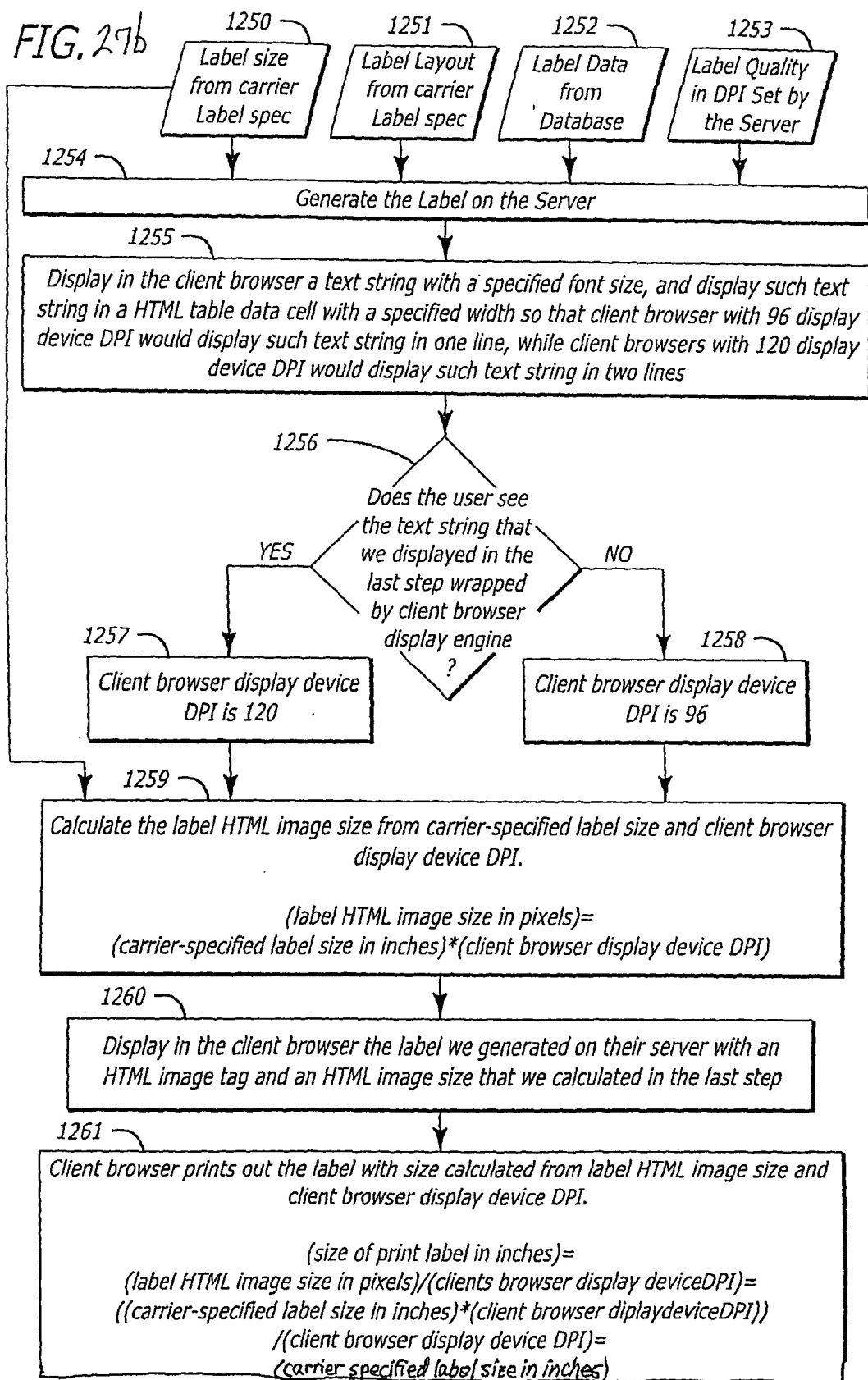
Returns services by iShip.com

**iShip.com**  
 Your Internet Package Shipper®

FIG. 27a



FIG. 27b



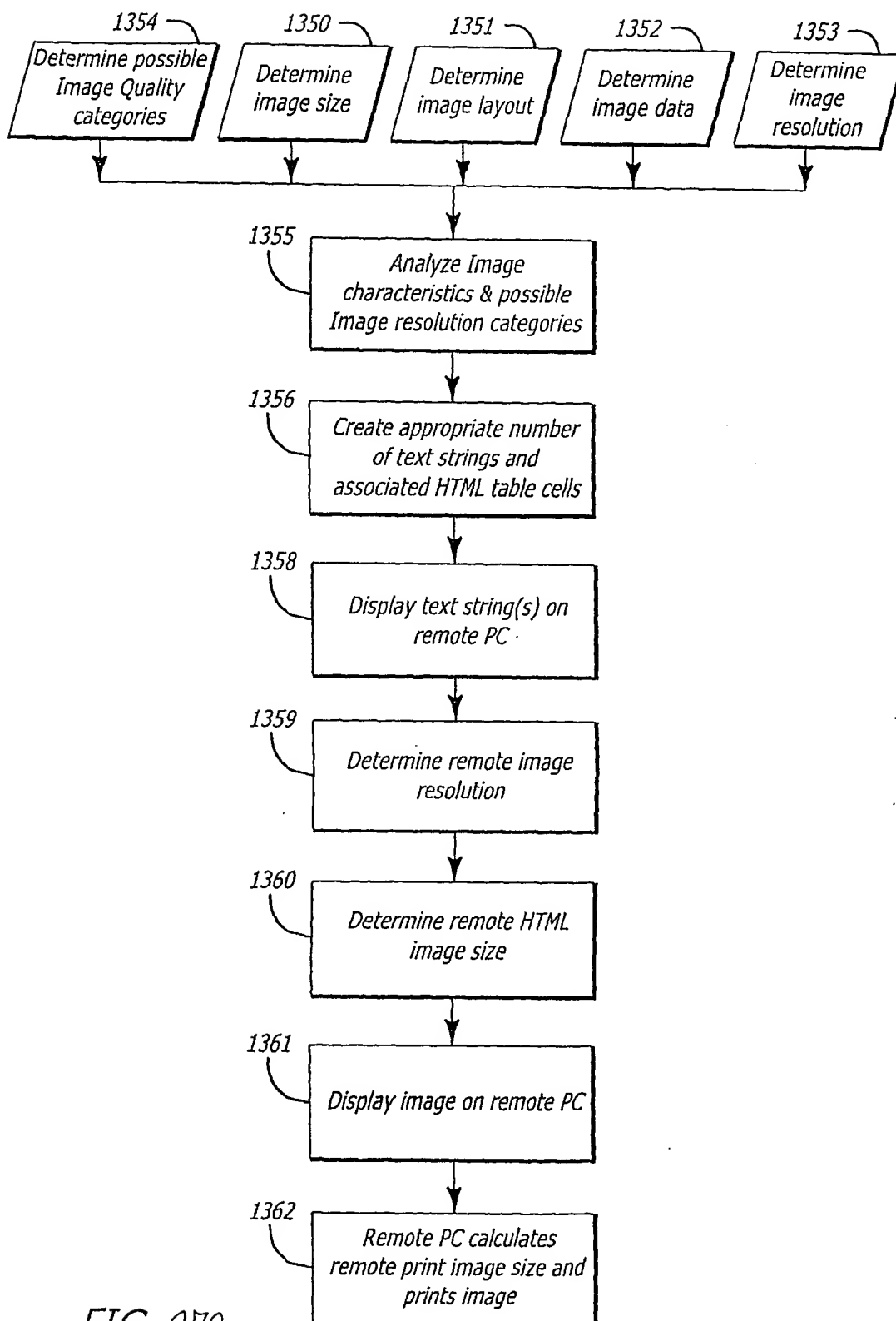


FIG. 27C

Merchant Logo

Merchant Main Menu Choices

Returns Service

Return to Your Order History

**Thank you for shopping Amazon.com**

We will issue a refund as soon as we receive your package. — 455

Return to your Amazon.com Welcome Page.

— 456

Merchant

Return to Your Order History

— 456

SubMenu

Selections

Top of Page

FIG. 28

Back to [Returns Index](#) • Back to [Package Shipped Email](#)

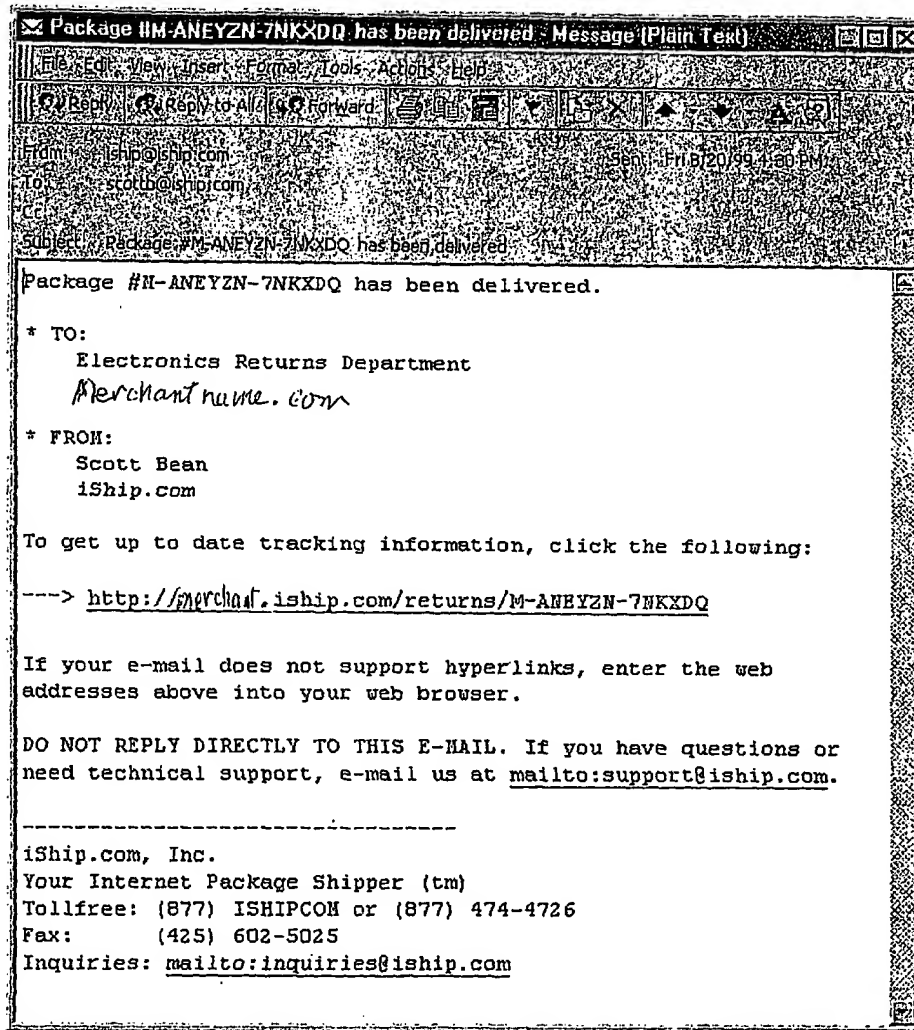


FIG. 29

Back to [Returns Index](#) • Forward to [Return Package Delivered Email](#)

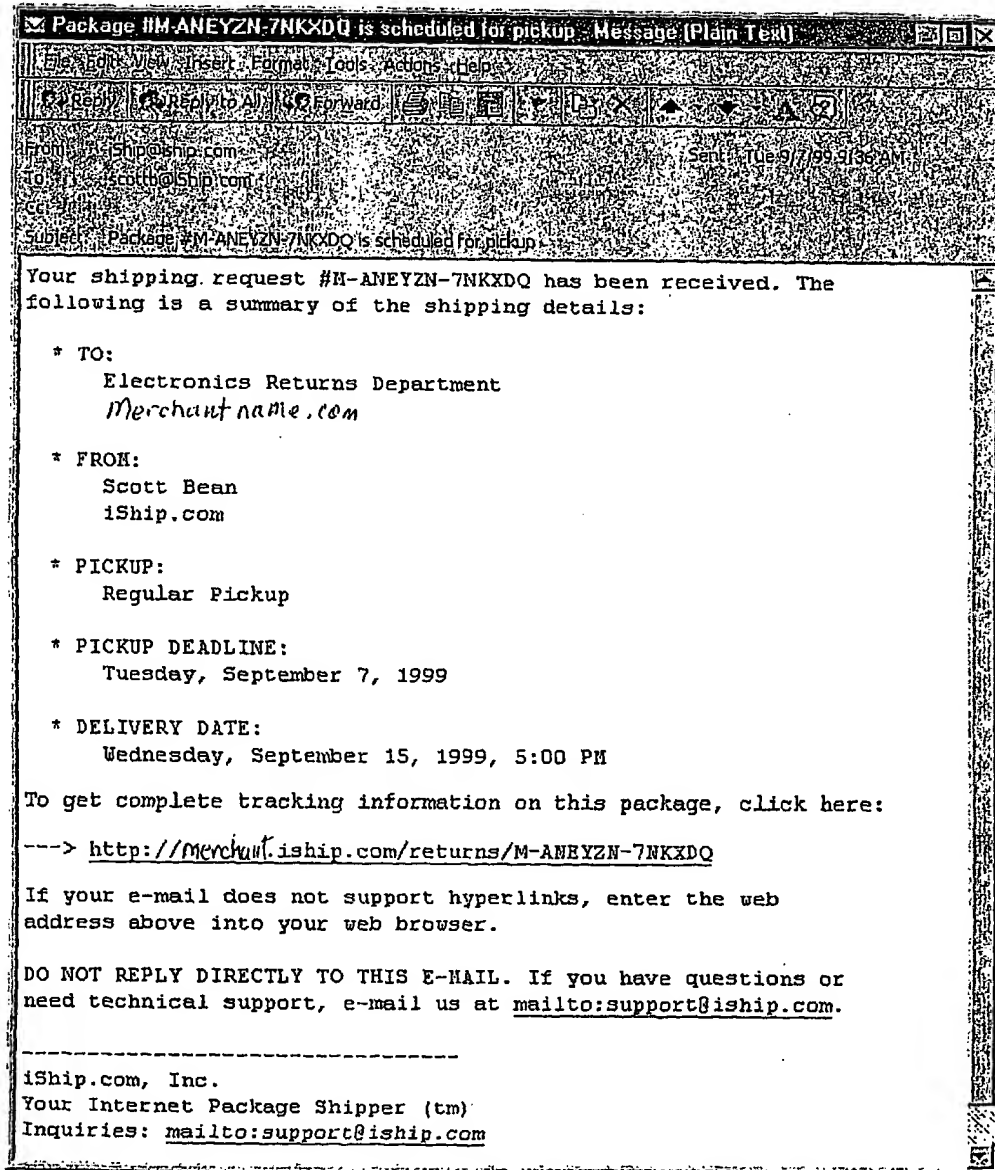


Fig 30

## Merchant Logo

## Merchant Main Menu Choices

Returns ServiceReturn to Your Order History

Within 30 days of receipt of your shipment, you may return:

- Any book in original condition.
- Any unopened CD, DVD, VHS tape, or software.
- Any electronics merchandise or toy in new condition with its original packaging and accessories.

We will issue a full refund for the price of any item that meets these conditions. We only refund shipping costs if the item is a result of our error.

Merchant

**Order#:** 002-0152586-5576810**Date:** July 19, 1999 at 09:58 AM PDT**Status:** All items shipped

SubMenu

Selections

**Select the items you would like to return:****Price:**

- ☐ 1 of: Permission Marketing : Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers [Audio Cassette]  
By: Seth Godin(Reader)  
1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$14.40
- ☐ 1 of: Yeah, It's That Easy [ECD] [Audio CD]  
By: G. Love & Special Sauce  
1 shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via US First Class. \$12.99
- ☐ 1 of: For Those About To Rock We Salute You [ORIGINAL RECORDING REMASTERED] [Audio CD]  
By: AC/DC  
1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$11.49
- ☐ 1 of: Odelay [Audio CD]  
By: Beck  
1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$12.99
- 421-5 ☐ 1 of: Natty Dread [Audio CD] 2 408-5  
By: Charlie Hunter Quartet  
1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$12.99
- ☐ 1 of: Duo [Audio CD]  
By: Charlie Hunter, Leon Parker  
1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$12.99
- ☐ 1 of: ... [Wireless] ... [Electronics]  
By: RCA  
1 shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via UPS Ground.  
Track your package with iShip.com \$149.95

Item(s) Subtotal: \$227.80

Shipping &amp; Handling: \$19.56

Total Before Tax: \$247.36

Tax: \$21.29

TOTAL: \$268.65

Next Step &gt;&gt;

Return to Your Order History

Top of Page

FIG. 31

**Merchant Logo****Merchant Main Menu Choices**

Merchant

SubMenu

Selections

Returns ServiceReturn to Your Order History**Order#:** 002-0152586-5576810**Date:** July 19, 1999 at 09:58 AM PDT**Status:** All items shipped**Items to Return:****Price:**☒ 1 of: Natty Dread! [Audio CD]  
By: Charlie Hunter Quartet

\$12.99 - 173

Item(s) Subtotal Before Tax: \$12.99 - 173

Refunded Tax: \$1.30 - 174

TOTAL: \$14.29 - 172

**Reason for return:**☒ Customer Choice☐ Incorrect Item Received☐ Arrived Damaged/Defective☐ Other (please specify below):I thought this was the Bob Marley CD,  
not some jazz thing.

Next Step

Return to Your Order HistoryTop of Page

FIG. 32

Merchant Logo

## Merchant Main Menu Choices

Returns Service[Return to Your Order History](#)**Returning Your Package:****Price:**

Please make sure your item is in original condition. Please use the original packaging, or other appropriate packaging. We will not issue a refund for items damaged in transit.

I of: Natty Dread [Audio CD]By: Charlie Hunter Quartet

\$12.99

Reason for return: Customer ChoiceComments: I thought this was the Bob Marley CD, not some jazz thing.

Merchant

SubMenu

TOTAL REFUND: \$14.29

Through our partnership with iShip.com, you can print a return label directly from your computer or take your package to a Mail Boxes Etc. To print a shipping label, you must have a printer that prints 300 dpi or better.

Selections

469 ~ How would you like to return the package? (Select One)

470 ~ UPS 471 ~ US Postal Service 472 ~ FedEx 473 ~ Mail Boxes Etc. 474 ~ Retail Store

475 ~ Is your item packaged in the original shipping box?

476 ~ Yes 477 ~ No

478 ~ How would you like to pay for the return shipping? (Select One)

479 ~ Credit Card: 480 ~ Visa 481 ~ MasterCard 482 ~ AmEx

Name on Card: Scott J. Bean 483Number: 4444444444444444 484Expiration: 09/02 485

486

My Carrier Account:

487

Number:

Next Step &gt;&gt;&gt; 422

[Return to Your Order History](#) 406[Top of Page](#)

FIG. 33



# iShip.com



## Prepare Your Shipping Estimate

To find out the available services and charges for your shipment, fill out the information below. You will be able to add service options on the next page.

**To get started, simply complete the form below and choose Continue!**

<b>Enter the Shipment Weight and Packaging</b> 500 {	<b>My shipment will weigh:</b> lbs. <input type="text" value="2"/> oz. (Include the weight of all packing materials. You may use a weight estimate for shipments that weigh more than 150 pounds.) I am using the following packaging: 501 <input type="radio"/> 502 <input checked="" type="radio"/> Carrier Letter 503 <input type="radio"/> Carrier Box 504 <input type="radio"/> Carrier Pak or Tube 505 <input type="radio"/> Other packaging. The dimensions (in inches) are: 506 { Length <input type="text"/> in. Width <input type="text"/> in. Height <input type="text"/> in. 507 <input type="radio"/> The packaging is irregular or is not standard
<b>Enter Your Postal Codes</b>	<b>I will ship the item FROM:</b> This postal code: <input type="text" value="91105"/> 98125, for example <b>I will ship the item TO:</b> This postal code: <input type="text" value="98125"/> 98125, for example This city: <input type="text"/> This country: <input type="text" value="USA"/> The delivery address for my shipment is a: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Business <input type="radio"/> Residence iShip.com currently supports packages shipped from the U.S.
<b>Add Carrier Loss Protection</b> 516 {	I want to protect my shipment from carrier loss or damage. The value of the contents is: \$ <input type="text" value="1"/> Most services automatically protect your shipment up to \$100. However, USPS Priority Mail and Parcel Post do not have automatic protection. Some USPS services have no available Loss Protection.

[Learn More](#)
[Learn More](#)
[Learn More](#)



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FIG. 34

# iShip.com



## Select Your Options

Select Your Carriers	<p>I will ship my item using any of the following carriers:</p> <p>520 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AIRBORNE EXPRESS</p> <p>521 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FedEx</p> <p>522 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UPS</p> <p>523 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE</p> <p>Note: Your shipping charges will be based on carriers' basic rates. If you have an account with custom rates, your actual shipping charges will be different from those shown.</p>
Select Your Drop-Off/Pickup Option	<p>I will ship my package from:</p> <p>524 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> My location by calling the carrier for pickup 525</p> <p>OR</p> <p>My Drop-Off/Pickup Option is different for each carrier:</p> <p><b>Advanced</b> 526</p> <p>If you are unsure of which shipping location to select, click the Learn More button for more information. <a href="#">Learn More</a> 527</p>
Enter Your Handling Charges	<p>I will add labor or materials fees to my shipping charge:</p> <p><input type="text"/> % of shipping charges and/or</p> <p>\$ <input type="text"/> fixed amount</p> <p>You will see the total of carrier shipping charges plus your handling charges. <a href="#">Learn More</a></p>
Select Your Shipping Date	<p>I will ship my item on: 530</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3/21/00 - Today 531</p> <p><a href="#">Learn More</a></p>
Select Tracking	<p>I want to be able to track the shipment until it has been delivered:</p> <p>532 <input checked="" type="radio"/> Required 533 <input type="radio"/> Optional</p> <p><a href="#">Learn More</a></p>

[Back](#)
[Continue](#)

422

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FIG. 35

Figure 1 is a screenshot of a web browser interface for shipping services. The interface includes a "Rates & Times" section with a table of shipping rates for various carriers (Airborne, FedEx, UPS, USPS) and a "Compare Services" section with buttons for "<<Back", "Next>>", "Reset", "Cancel", and "Help". The table shows rates for different times of day (8:00 AM, 10:30 AM, 12:00 PM, 3:00 PM, 4:30 PM, 5:00 PM) and dates (28 SEP 99, 29 SEP 99, 30 SEP 99). The interface is annotated with numerous reference numerals (e.g., 1109a, 1109b, 1063, 1064-1, 1064-2, 1064-3, 1065a, 1064-5, 1064-6, 1064-7, 1064-8, 1064-9, 1064-10, 1064-11, 1064-12, 1064-13, 1064-14, 1064-15, 1064-16, 1064-17, 1064-18, 1064-19, 1064-20, 1064-21, 1064-22, 1064-23, 1064-24, 1064-25, 1064-26, 1064-27, 1064-28, 1064-29, 1064-30, 1064-31, 1064-32, 1064-33, 1064-34, 1064-35, 1064-36, 1064-37, 1064-38, 1064-39, 1064-40, 1064-41, 1064-42, 1064-43, 1064-44, 1064-45, 1064-46, 1064-47, 1064-48, 1064-49, 1064-50, 1064-51, 1064-52, 1064-53, 1064-54, 1064-55, 1064-56, 1064-57, 1064-58, 1064-59, 1064-60, 1064-61, 1064-62, 1064-63, 1064-64, 1064-65, 1064-66, 1064-67, 1064-68, 1064-69, 1064-70, 1064-71, 1064-72, 1064-73, 1064-74, 1064-75, 1064-76, 1064-77, 1064-78, 1064-79, 1064-80, 1064-81, 1064-82, 1064-83, 1064-84, 1064-85, 1064-86, 1064-87, 1064-88, 1064-89, 1064-90, 1064-91, 1064-92, 1064-93, 1064-94, 1064-95, 1064-96, 1064-97, 1064-98, 1064-99, 1064-100).

FIG. 36a

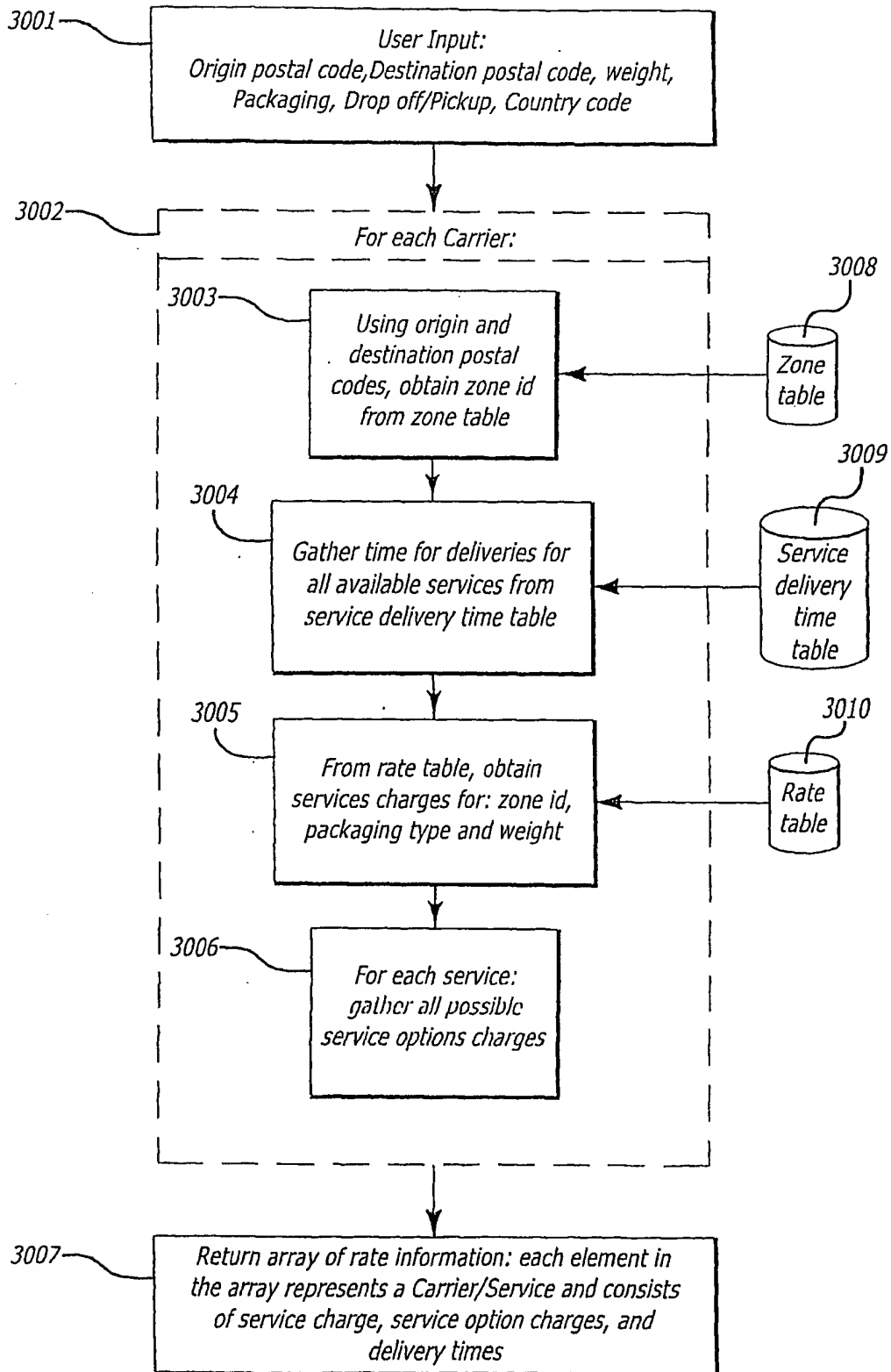


FIG. 36b

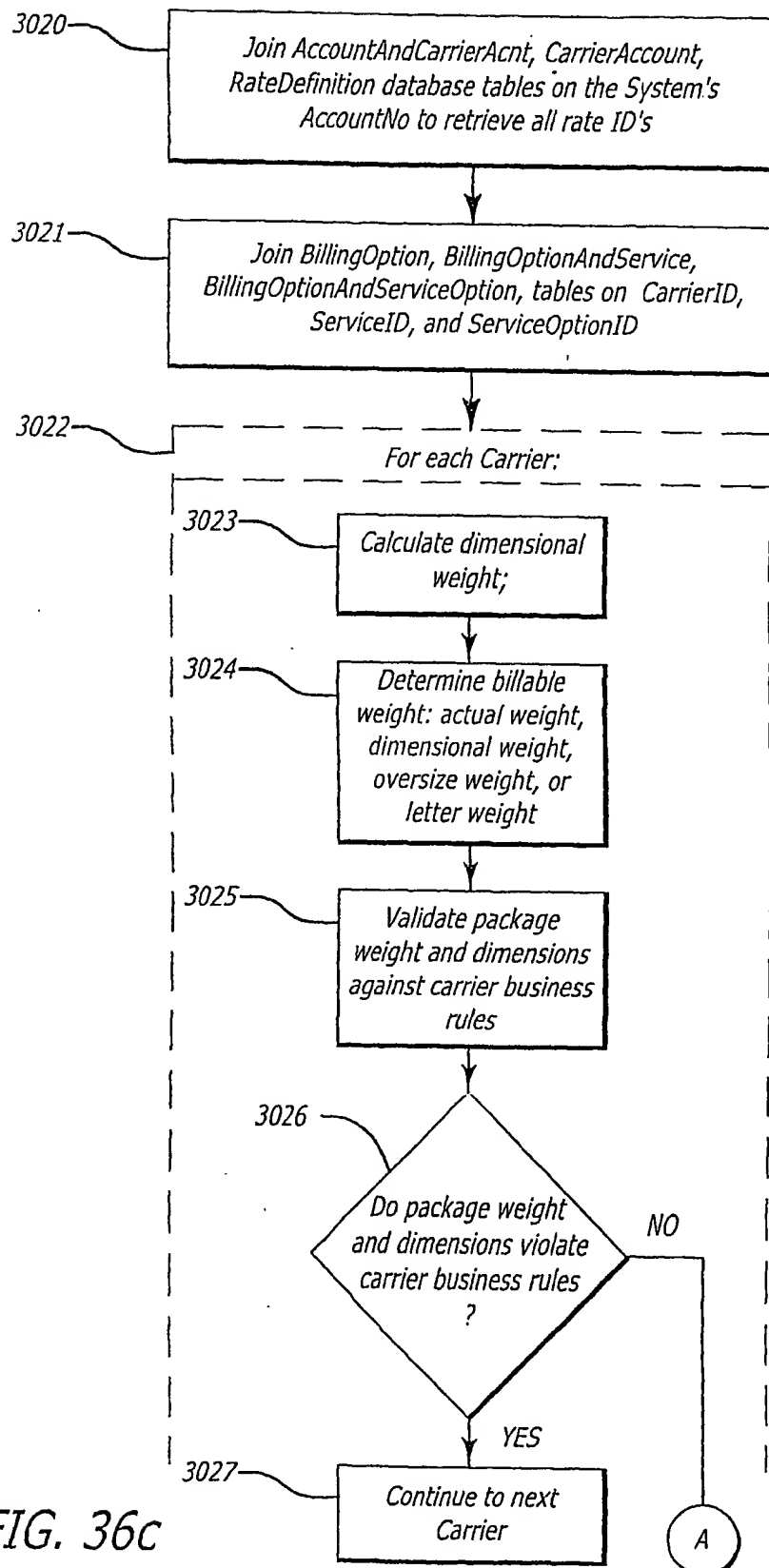


FIG. 36c

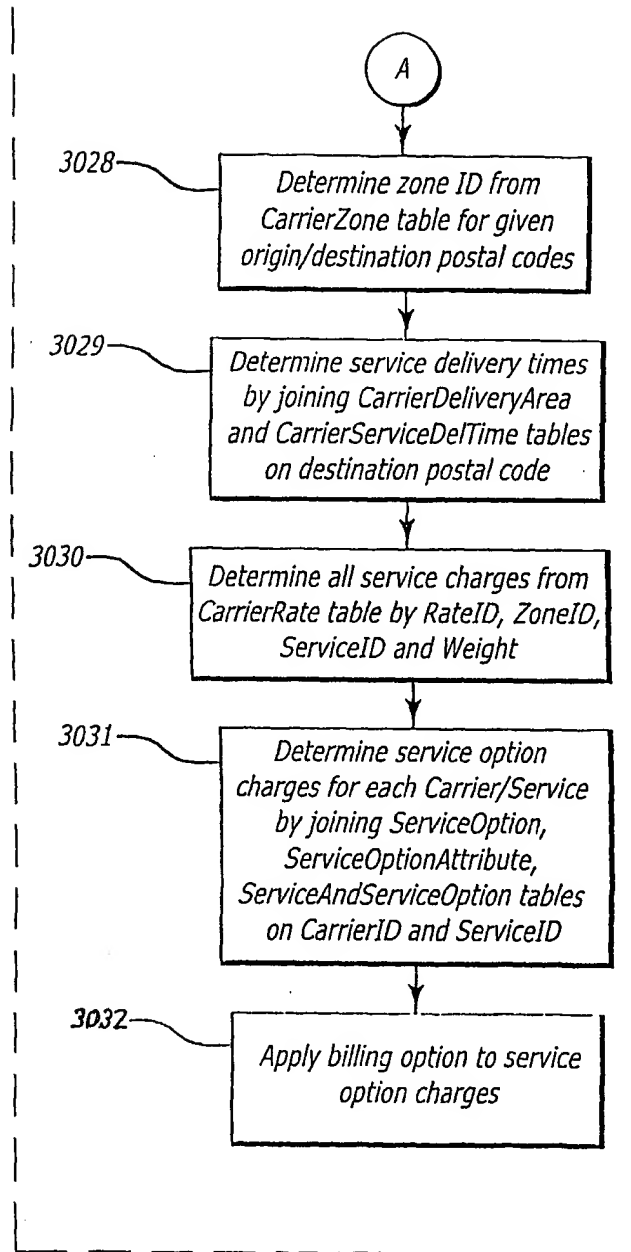


FIG. 36d

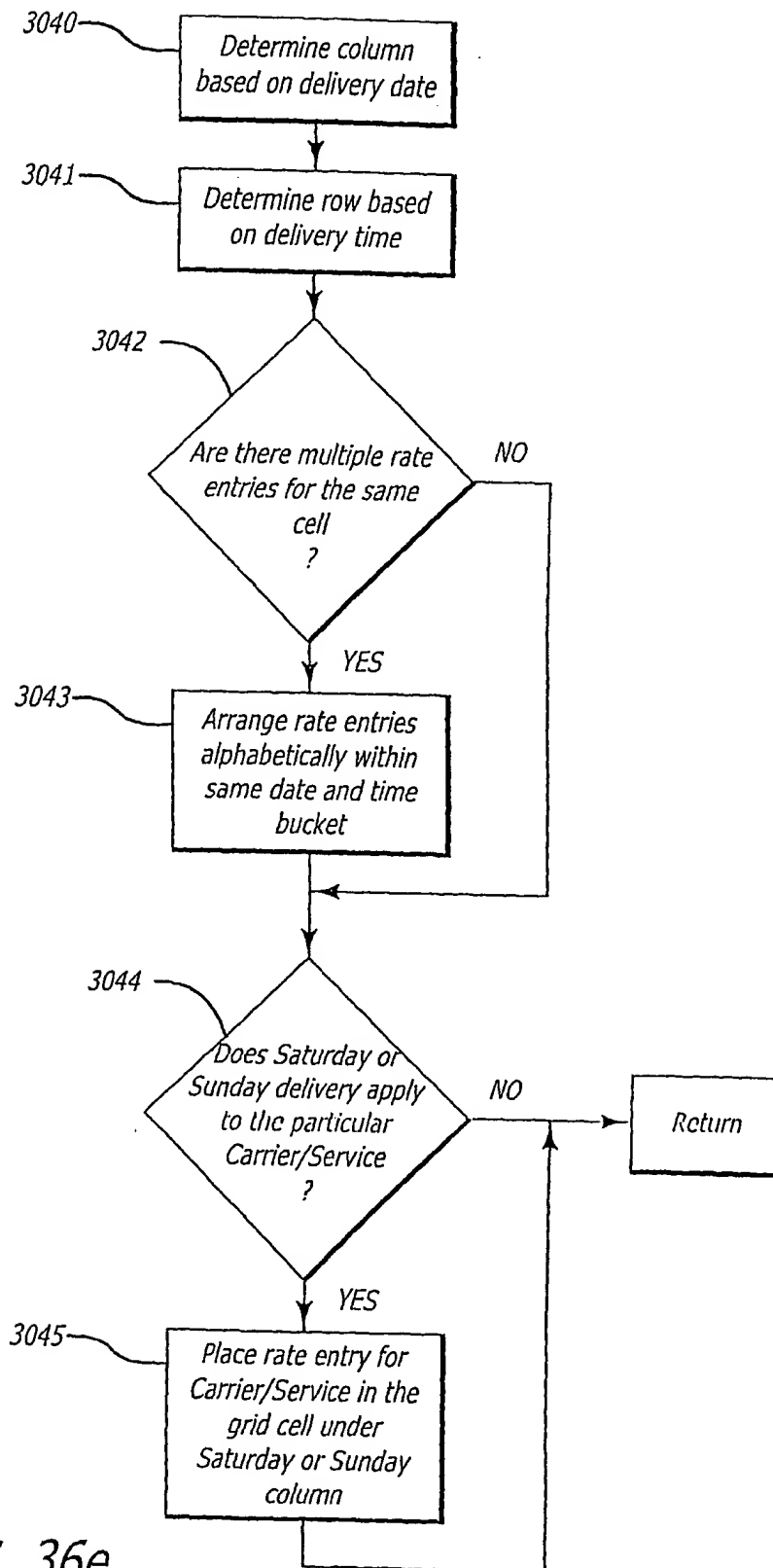


FIG. 36e

# iShip.com



## Shipping Charges and Delivery Times

RATES & DELIVERY TIMES - Place cursor over square next to the rate to view carrier and service.

	WED 22 MAR 00	THU 23 MAR 00	FRI 24 MAR 00
9:00 AM	\$42.00		
10:30 AM	\$18.45		
	\$17.00		
12:00 PM	\$20.00	\$10.90	
3:00 PM	\$16.65		
	\$16.25		
4:30 PM		\$11.50	\$10.16
END OF DAY		\$10.00	
		\$11.45	

### CARRIERS

- FedEx
- UPS
- USPS

To view a printable summary, click on a rate.

I want a guaranteed delivery time: Yes No

[Learn More](#)

[Back](#) [Update](#) [Done](#)

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FIG. 37



**iShip.com****Summary**

<b>Shipment</b>	<b>Origin Postal Code:</b>	91105
	<b>Destination Country:</b>	USA
	<b>Destination Postal Code:</b>	98125
	<b>Actual Weight:</b>	0.125
	<b>Billed Weight:</b>	1 lbs.
	<b>Packaging:</b>	Carrier Letter
	<b>Service:</b>	UPS Second Day Air AM
<b>Charges</b>	<b>Service Options:</b>	None Chosen
	<b>Service:</b>	\$ 10.80
	<b>Service Options:</b>	\$ 0.00
	<b>Total:</b>	\$ 10.80

To arrange for pickup, contact UPS at: **1-800-PICK-UPS** (1-800-742-5877)

To find a drop off location near you, [click here](#).



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FIG. 38

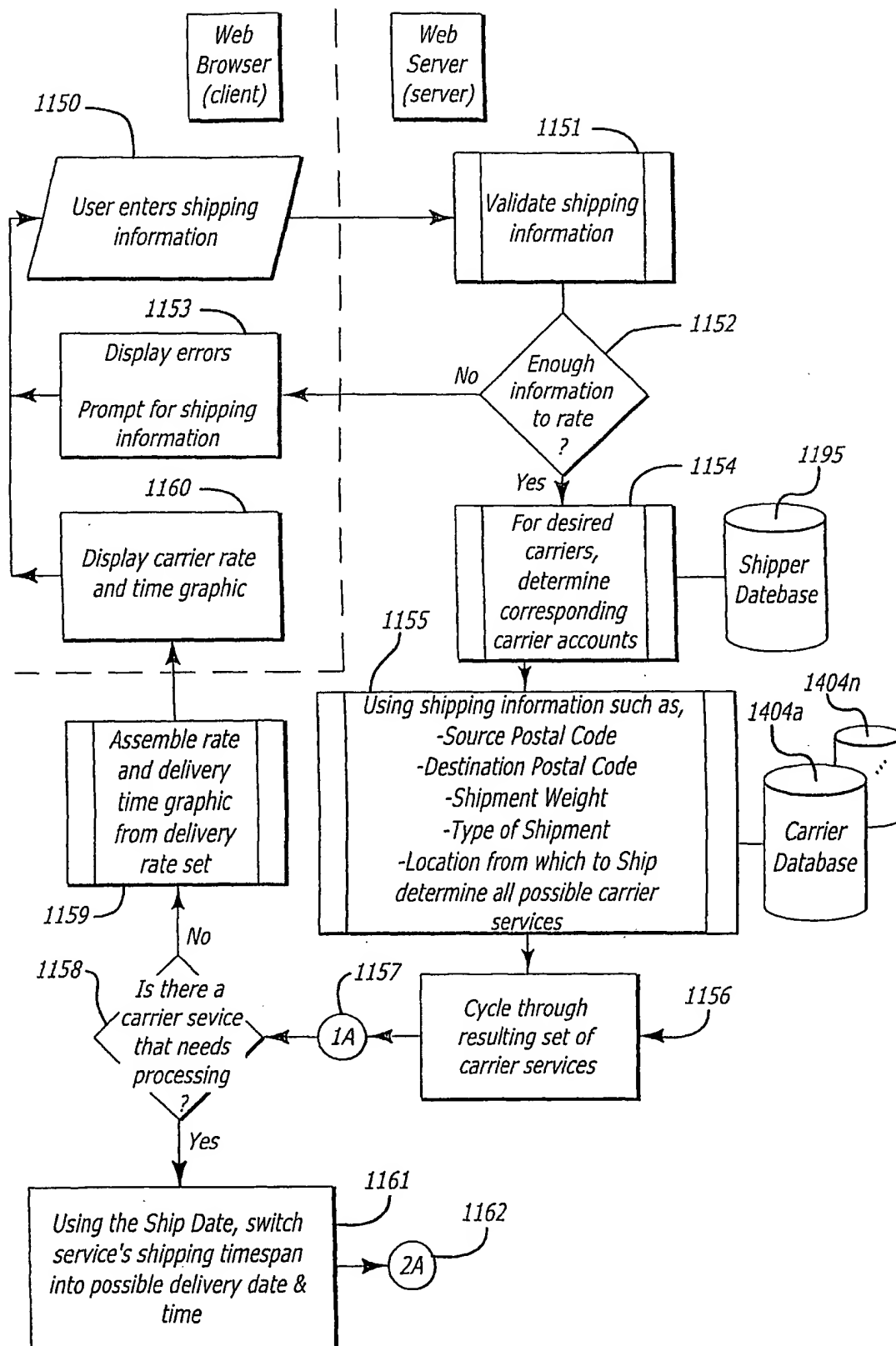


FIG. 39a

FIG. 39b

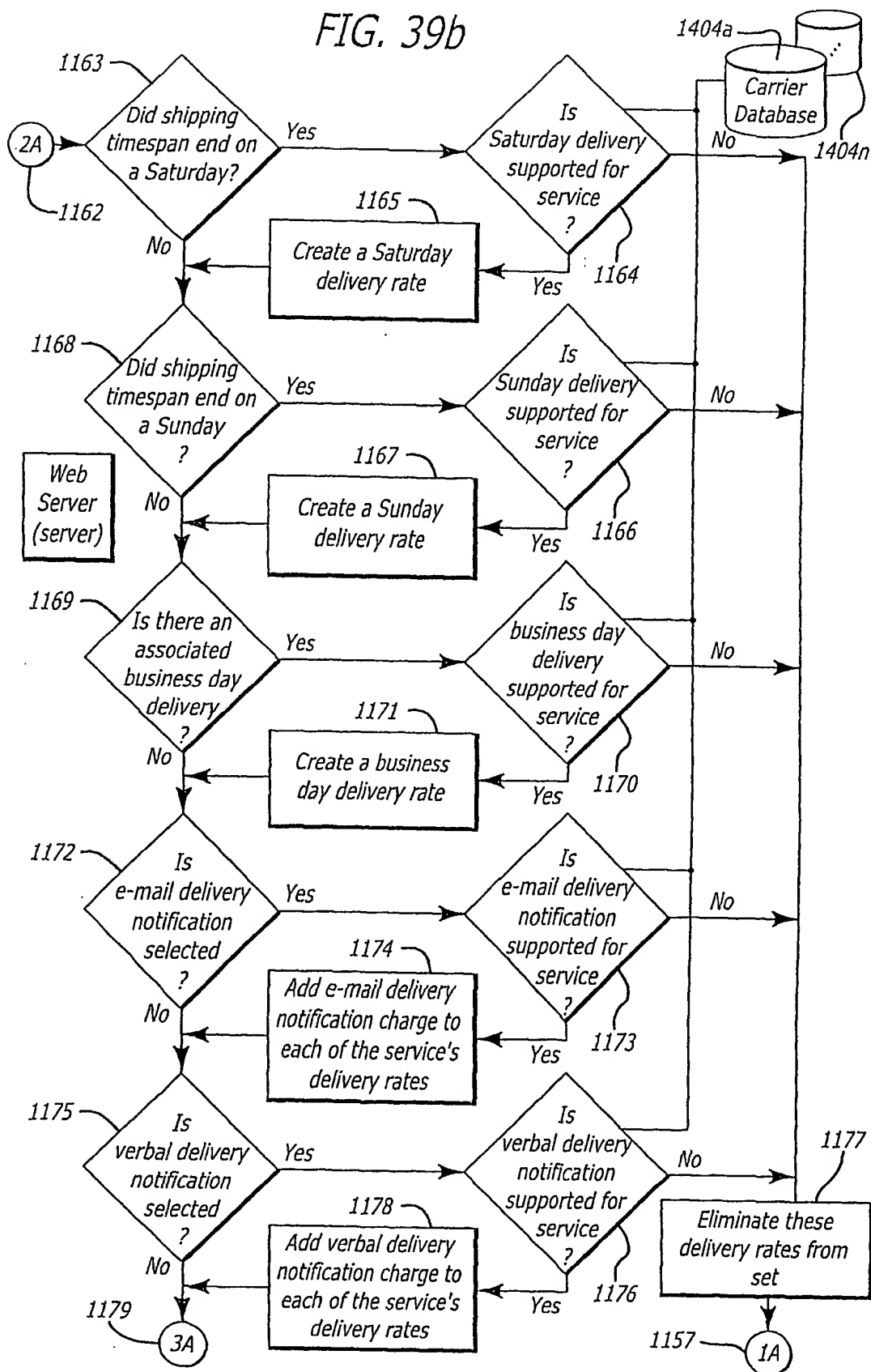
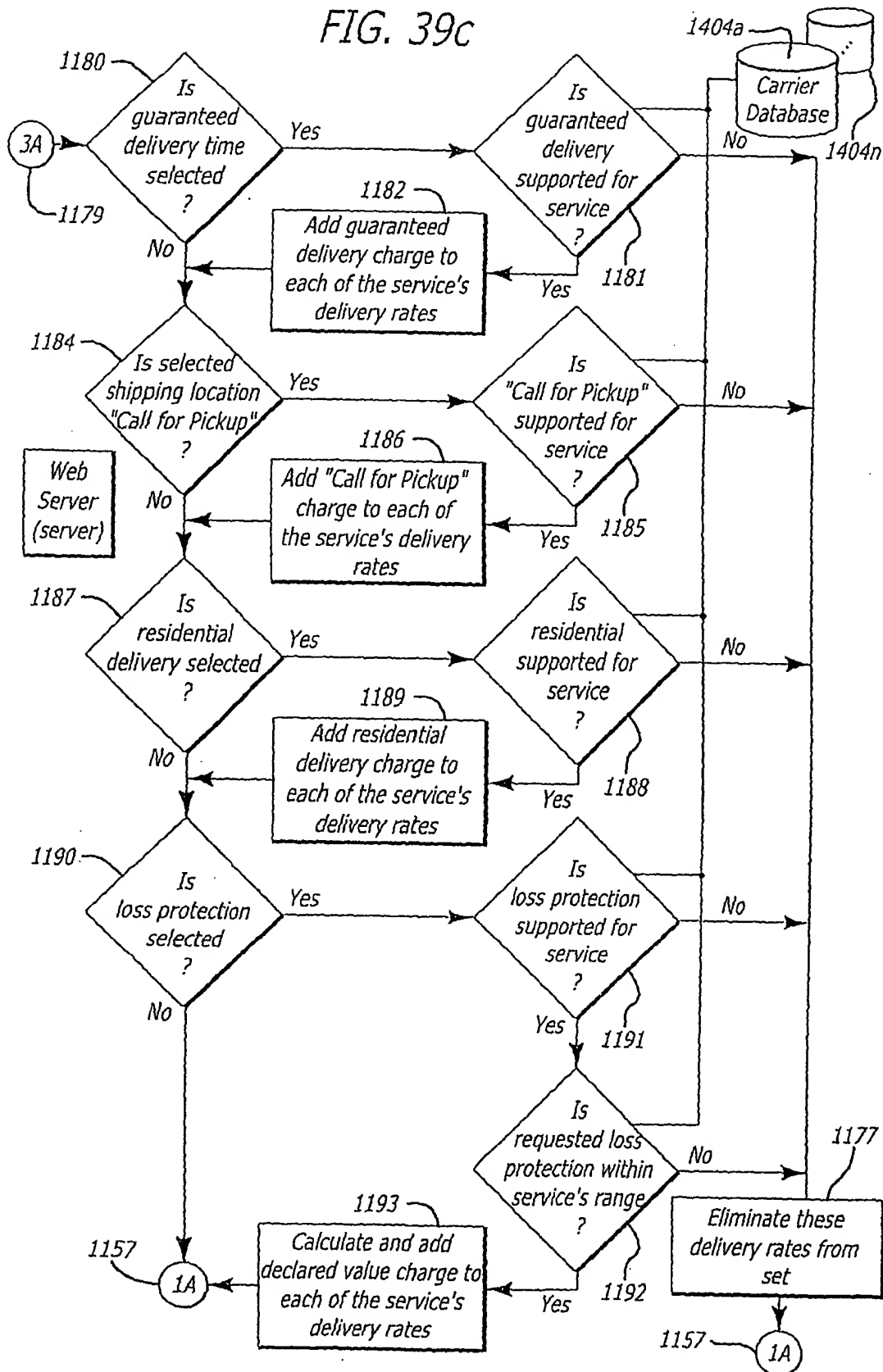


FIG. 39c



## Merchant Logo

## Merchant Main Menu Choices

Merchant

SubMenu

Selections

Order Summary[Return to Your Order History](#)

**Order#:** 002-0152586-5576810  
**Date:** July 19, 1999 at 09:58 AM PDT  
**Status:** All items shipped

**Shipping Address:**  
 Scott J. Bean  
 iShip.com  
 2515 - 140th Ave NE Suite E-110  
 Bellevue, WA 98005 USA  
 425.602.5022

**Returns? Click Here:**  
[Return services to iShip.com](#)

**iShip.com**  
 Your Internet Package Shipper™

**Ship Method:** Standard Shipping  
**Number of Shipments:** One shipment when complete order is ready  
**Payment Method:** Visa  
 Last 5 digits: 26781

<b>Items Ordered:</b>	<b>Price:</b>
1 of: <u>Permission Marketing : Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers</u> [Audio Cassette] By: Seth Godin(Reader) 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority.	\$14.40
1 of: <u>Yeah, It's That Easy</u> [ECD] [Audio CD] By: G. Love & Special Sauce 1 shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via US First Class.	\$12.99
1 of: <u>For Those About To Rock We Salute You</u> [ORIGINAL RECORDING REMASTERED] [Audio CD] By: AC/DC 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority.	\$11.49
1 of: <u>Qdelay</u> [Audio CD] By: Beck 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority.	\$12.99
1 of: <u>Natty Dread</u> [Audio CD] By: Charlie Hunter Quartet 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority.	\$12.99
1 of: <u>Duo</u> [Audio CD] By: Charlie Hunter, Leon Parker 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority.	\$12.99
1 of: <u>RCA WSP150900MHz Wireless Speakers</u> [Electronics] By: RCA 1 shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via UPS Ground. <u>Track your package with iShip.com</u>	\$149.95

405

Item(s) Subtotal: \$227.80  
 Shipping & Handling: \$19.56  
 Total Before Tax: \$247.36  
 Tax: \$21.29  
**TOTAL: \$268.65**

Return to [Your Order History](#)

[Top of Page](#)

FIG. 40

**Merchant Logo**

### Merchant Main Menu Choices

### Package Tracking Results

[Return to Your Order History](#)

**Tracking Information:**

Status:	DELIVERED
Delivered To:	Bellevue, WA USA
Delivery Date:	Thursday, July 22, 1999
Delivery Time:	9:13 AM
Delivery Location:	Reception
Signed By:	Bourne
Carrier:	UPS
Service:	Ground
Tracking Number:	1Z53X86X0302121560

**Shipping Address:**

**Scott J. Bean**  
iShip.com  
2515 - 140th Ave NE Suite E-110  
Bellevue, WA 98005 USA  
425.602.5022

**Tracking Services By:**



Merchant

SubMenu

## Selections

**Order#:** 002-0152586-5576810  
**Date:** July 19, 1999 at 09:58 AM PDT  
**Status:** All items shipped

Return to Your Order History

Top of Page

V. Gi. Hs

## Merchant Logo

## Merchant Main Menu Choices

Merchant

SubMenu

Selections

Order Summary[Return to Your Order History](#)

**Order#:** 002-0152586-5576810  
**Date:** July 19, 1999 at 09:58 AM PDT  
**Status:** All items shipped

**Shipping Address:**

Scott J. Bean  
 iShip.com  
 2515 - 140th Ave NE Suite E-110  
 Bellevue, WA 98005 USA  
 425.602.5022

**Returns? Click Here:**  
[Return services to iShip.com](#)

**Ship Method:**

Standard Shipping

**Number of Shipments: Payment Method:**

One shipment when complete  
 order is ready

Visa  
 Last 5 digits: 26781

**Items Ordered:****Price:**

1 of: Permission Marketing : Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers [Audio Cassette]  
 By: Seth Godin(Reader)  
 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$14.40

1 of: Yeah, It's That Easy [ECD] [Audio CD]  
 By: G. Love & Special Sauce  
 1 shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via US First Class. \$12.99

1 of: For Those About To Rock We Salute You [ORIGINAL RECORDING REMASTERED] [Audio CD]  
 By: AC/DC  
 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$11.49

1 of: Qdelay [Audio CD]  
 By: Beck  
 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$12.99

1 of: Natty Dread [Audio CD]  
 By: Charlie Hunter Quartet  
 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$12.99

1 of: Duo [Audio CD]  
 By: Charlie Hunter, Leon Parker  
 1 shipped on Jul. 19, 1999 via US Priority. \$12.99

1 of: RCA WSP150 900MHz Wireless Speakers [Electronics]  
 By: RCA  
 1 shipped on Jul. 20, 1999 via UPS Ground. \$149.95  
 Track your package with iShip.com

405

Item(s) Subtotal: \$227.80  
 Shipping & Handling: \$19.56  
 -----  
 Total Before Tax: \$247.36  
 Tax: \$21.29  
 -----  
**TOTAL: \$268.65**

[Return to Your Order History](#)[Top of Page](#)

FIG. 42

# iShip.com™



## Track Your Package

Track your package in one easy step. Enter the package tracking number in the field below and then click on Submit. In moments you'll learn where your package is and, if it's been delivered, who signed for it.

[Learn More](#)

Enter tracking number:

Submit

Close

Tracking provided for



FedEx



[Having trouble? Click here for help.](#) • [Questions or comments about iShip.com? Click here.](#) • [iShip.com Privacy Policy](#)  
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FIG. 43



**iShip.com™****Track Your Package**

Track your package in one easy step. Enter the package tracking number in the field below and then click on Submit. In moments you'll learn where your package is and, if it's been delivered, who signed for it.

[Learn More](#)

Enter tracking number: 1Z53X86X0302121560 601

602

603

Tracking provided for



[Having trouble? Click here for help.](#) • [Questions or comments about iShip.com? Click here.](#) • [iShip.com Privacy Policy](#)  
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Fig. 44

**iShip.com****Your Tracking Information**

Status: **DELIVERED**  
Last Scan: **3/3/00 3:53:00 PM DELIVERY**  
**SAN ANTONIO-SOUTHWES, TX US**  
Delivered To: **SAN ANTONIO, TX US**  
Delivery Date: **Friday, March 3, 2000**  
Delivery Time: **3:53:00 PM**  
Delivery Location: **PORCH**  
Carrier: **UPS**  
Service: **GROUND**  
Tracking Number: **1Z53X86X0302121560**



Status as of Tuesday, March 21, 2000 2:26:19 PM Pacific Standard Time

[Learn More](#)**Track Another Package**

Enter tracking number:

**Submit**

601 602

Tracking provided for



[Having trouble? Click here for help.](#) • [Questions or comments about iShip.com? Click here.](#) • [iShip.com Privacy Policy](#)  
Copyright © 1998 - 2000 iShip.com, Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks properties of their owners.

FIG. 45



620 — 620-1 — 620-2 — 620-3 — 620-4 — 620-5 —	Display <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Returns</li> <li>• Delivered</li> <li>• Exceptions</li> <li>• In-transit</li> <li>• Return Requested</li> </ul>	To Be Delivered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today — 622-622-7</li> <li>• In 2 days — 622-2</li> <li>• In 3 days — 622-3</li> <li>• In 4 days — 622-4</li> <li>• In 5 days — 622-5</li> <li>• In 6 days — 622-6</li> <li>• In 7 days — 622-7</li> <li>• This Week — 622-8</li> <li>• In the next 7 days — 622-9</li> <li>• In the next 14 days — 622-10</li> </ul>	Sort By — 624 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention — 624-1</li> <li>• Carrier — 624-2</li> <li>• Company — 624-3</li> <li>• Service — 624-4</li> <li>• Ship Date — 624-5</li> <li>• Status — 624-6</li> </ul>
--	---	---	--

FIG. 47

<a href="#">MerchantSite.com</a>	<a href="#">Returns Manager</a>	<a href="#">Log Out</a>	<a href="#">Help</a>	<a href="#">iShip.com</a>
----------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------	---------------------------

**Merchant Logo****iShip.com**  
Your Internet Package Shipper™

User: John Smith

[View Inbound Return Shipments](#)Return to [View Inbound Return Shipments](#)

## 650 Tracking Information

Status: RETURN REQUESTED  
Delivered To:  
Delivery Date: Tuesday, September 7, 1999\*\*  
Delivery Time: 5:00 PM\*\*  
Delivery Location:  
Signed By:  
Carrier: Retail Store Return  
Service:  
Tracking Number: M A5UWAN PLF45T  
Ref Number:

## Shipping To

Merchant Name Retail Store  
008-NYC  
6000 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10001 USA  
888-555-1212

\*\* Indicates expected delivery date and time

## 660 Return Information

Return Authorization Number: R-52586-98411  
Category: Audio CD  
SKU: GEFWSP150-001  
Item Description: Natty Dread  
Manufacturer: Charlie Hunter Quartet  
Quantity: 1  
Item Price: \$12.99  
Item Tax: \$1.30  
Refund Amount: \$14.29  
Reason for Return: Customer Choice  
Customer Comments: I thought this was the Bob Marley CD, not some jazz thing.  
Shipping Paid By: N/A - walk-in return

## 670 Original Order Information

Order Number: A-52586-98411  
Order Date: July 19, 1999 at 09:58 AM PDT  
Order Status: All items shipped  
Customer Name: Suzanna Smith  
Customer ID: 00184322

FIG. 48

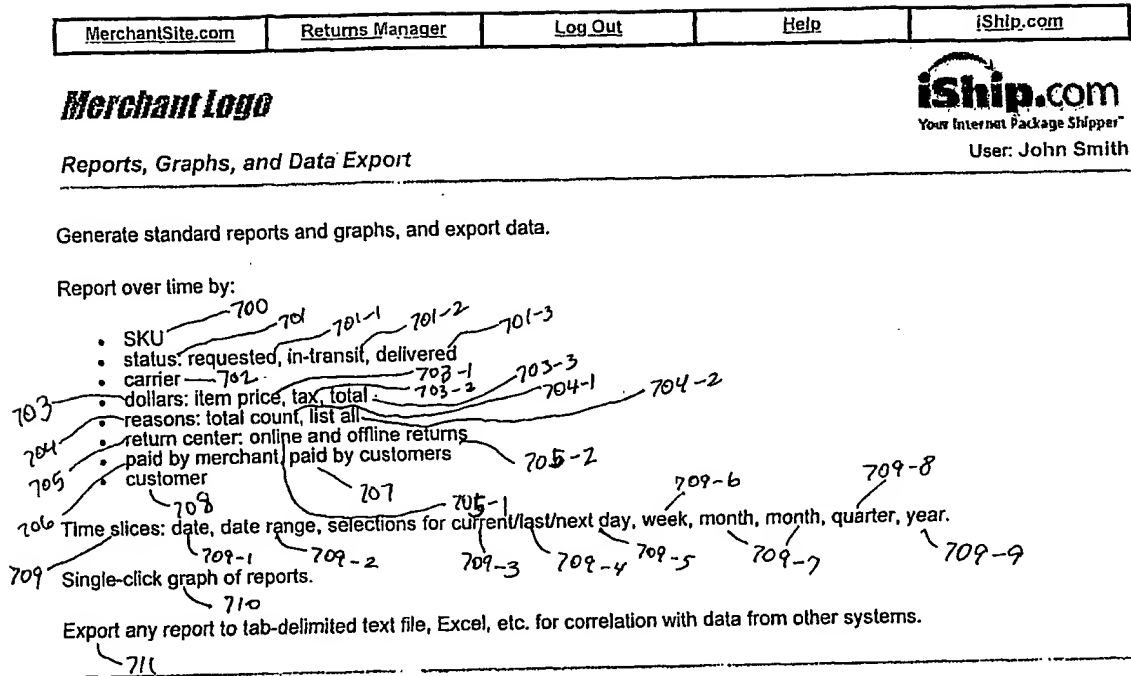
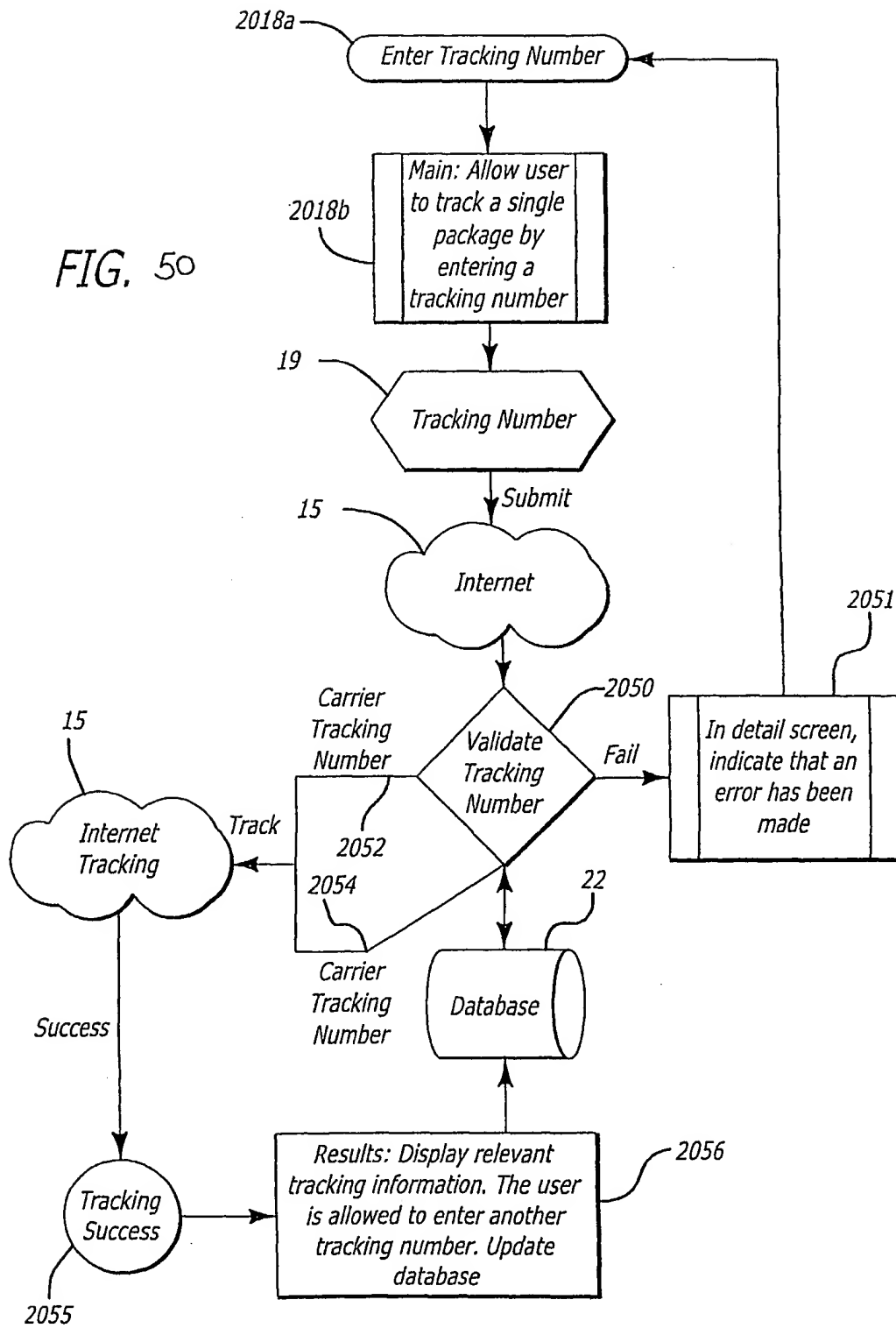


FIG. 50



```

<iship.com.request xmlns="x-schema:http://iship.com/api/schema/trackrequest.xml"
transactionid="3855BD2185E111d3984400A0C9D6C226">
  <header mode="interactive">
    <version major="0" minor="1"/>
    <batch id="AE5E54F08E2311d3984900A0C9D6C226"
      url="http://shasta/api/track/trackresponse.asp" email="bob@iship.com"/>
  </header>
  <signon sessionid="" userid="test" password="777777"/>
  <trackit>
    <package sequencenumber="1">
      <trackingnumber carrier="ups">
        1Z1812530202075466
      </trackingnumber>
    </package>
  </trackit>
  <logout/>
</iship.com.request>

```

FIG. 51

```

<iship.com.response transactionid="3855BD2185E111d3984400A0C9D6C226">
  <status ishiprcode="0" signonrcode="0" trackitrcode="0" parsercode="0"
    systemrcode="0"/>
  <trackit>
    <package sequencenumber="1" packagercode="0">
      <deliveredto></deliveredto>
      <deliverylocation>LEFT AT 3S</deliverylocation>
      <signedby>HOWARD</signedby>
      <lastscan>9/1/99 1:50:00 PM DELIVERY</lastscan>
      <status>Delivered</status>
      <deliverytime>9/1/99 1:50:00 PM</deliverytime>
      <carrier>UPS</carrier>
      <service>2ND DAY AIR</service>
      <shipdate>8/28/99</shipdate>
      <trackingnumber>1Z1812530202075466</trackingnumber>
      <scanlocation>FORT HAMILTON, NY US</scanlocation>
      <weight>400</weight>
    </package>
  </trackit>
</iship.com.response>

```

FIG. 52



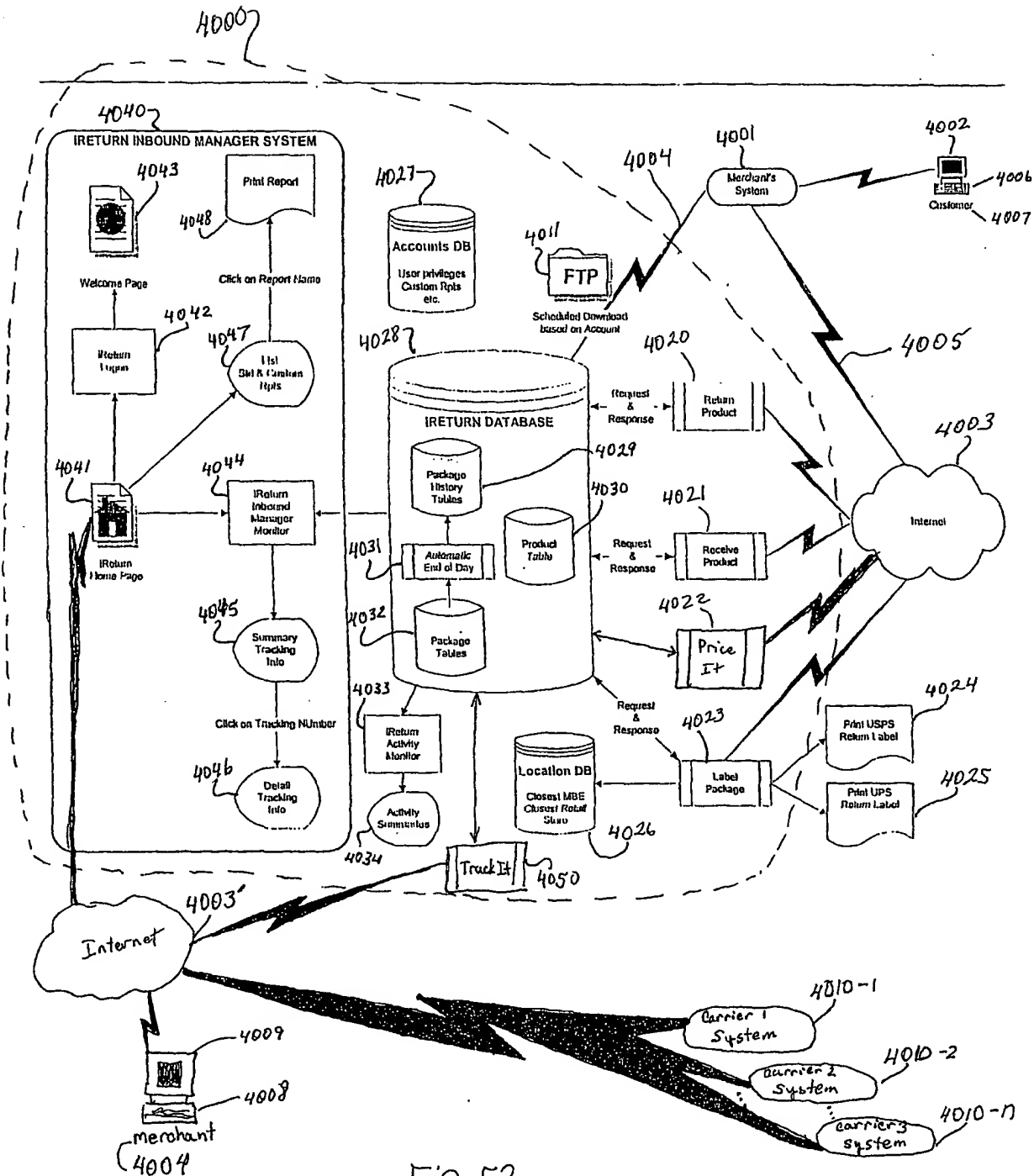


FIG. 53

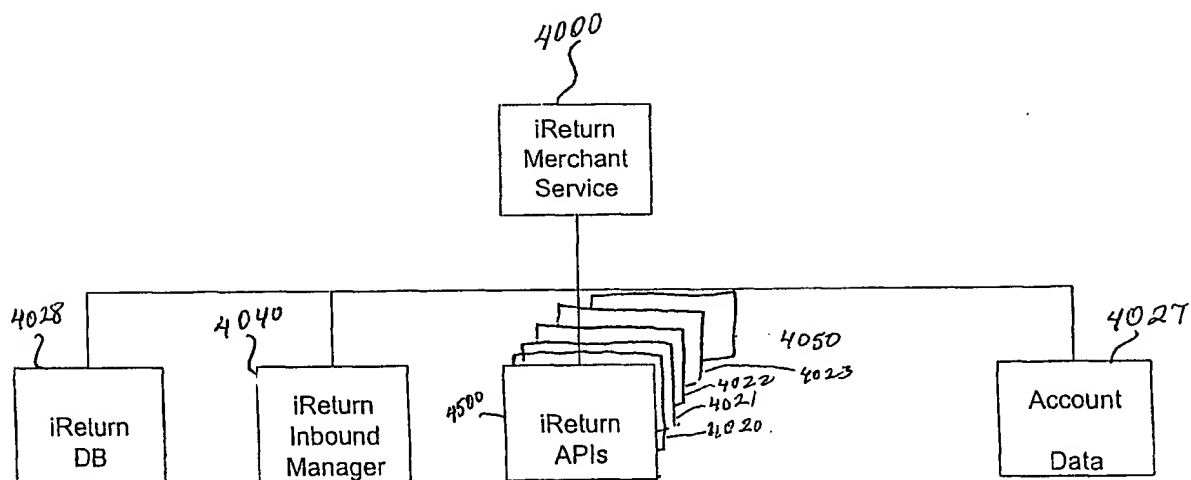


FIG. 54

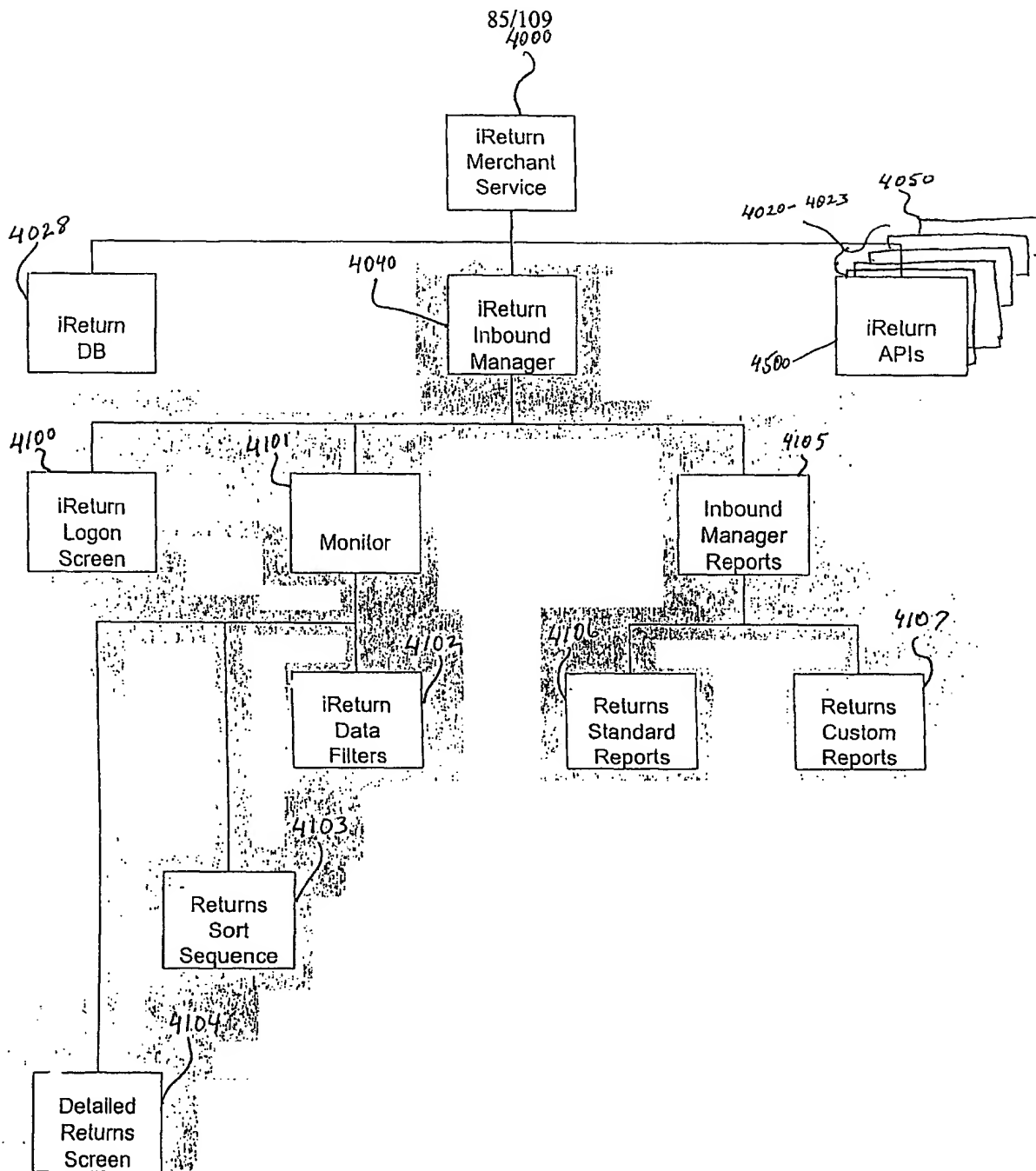


FIG. 55

86/109

4110 4123 4111 4125 4126 4112 4127 4113 4114 4132 4170

Monitor Inbound Manager Help

INBOUND PENDING Previous Next

Status: All Ship From: Delivery Date: All

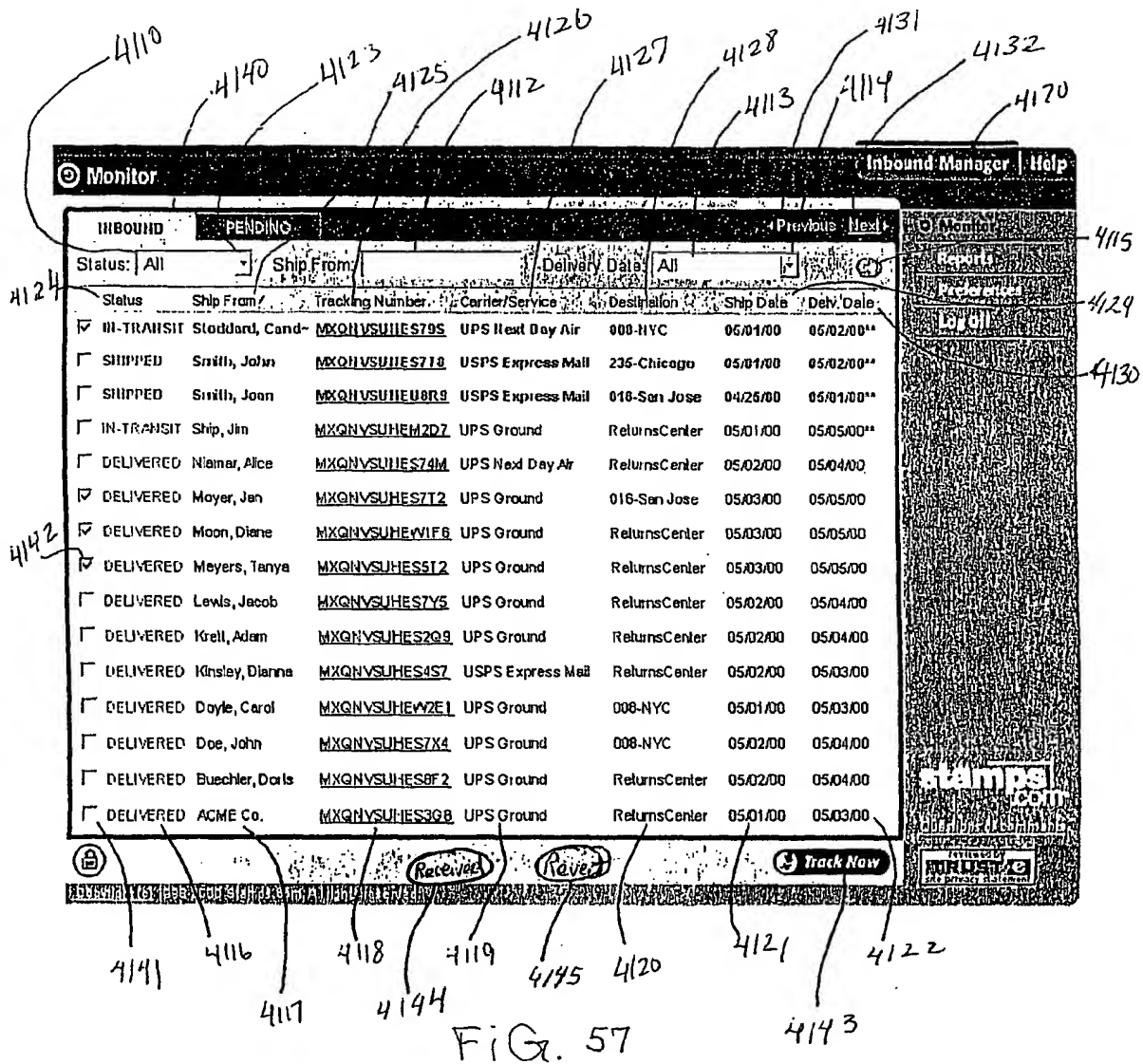
Status	Ship From	Tracking Number	Carrier/Service	Destination	Ship Date	Delv. Date
PREPARED	Boyle, Carol	MXQHVSUHE5795	UPS Next Day Air	008-NYC	04/21/00	04/24/00**
PREPARED	Doe, John	MXQHVSUHE57T8	UPS Next Day Air	235-Chicago	04/21/00	04/24/00**
PREPARED	Stoddard, Cand-	MXQHVSUHEU8R9	UPS Ground	016-San Jose	04/24/00	04/27/00**
PREPARED	Moyers, Tanya	MXQHVSUHEM2D7	UPS Ground	ReturnsCenter	04/26/00	04/28/00**
PREPARED	Krell, Adam	MXQHVSUHE574M	UPS Ground	ReturnsCenter	04/28/00	05/01/00**
PREPARED	Smith, John	MXQHVSUHE57T2	UPS Ground	016-San Jose	04/28/00	05/01/00**
PREPARED	Smith, Joan	MXQHVSUHEW1F6	UPS Ground	ReturnsCenter	04/27/00	05/02/00**
PREPARED	ACME Co.	MXQHVSUHE56T2	UPS Ground	ReturnsCenter	04/28/00	05/03/00**
PREPARED	Buechler, Doris	MXQHVSUHE57Y6	UPS Ground	ReturnsCenter	04/28/00	05/03/00**
PREPARED	Lewis, Jacob	MXQHVSUHE5298	UPS Ground	ReturnsCenter	05/01/00	05/04/00**
PREPARED	Moore, Diane	MXQHVSUHE54S7	UPS Ground	ReturnsCenter	05/03/00	05/04/00**
PREPARED	Moyer, Jan	MXQHVSUHEW2E1	UPS Ground	008-NYC	05/01/00	05/05/00**
FUTURE	Shp, Jim	MXQHVSUHE57X4	USPS Express Mail	008-NYC	05/02/00	05/05/00**
FUTURE	Nlainer, Alice	MXQHVSUHE58F2	USPS Express Mail	ReturnsCenter	05/02/00	05/05/00**
FUTURE	Kinsley, Danna	MXQHVSUHE53G8	USPS Express Mail	ReturnsCenter	05/03/00	05/08/00**

4115 4129 4130

stamps.com

4116 4117 4118 4119 4120 4121 4122

FIG. 56



**Monitor - Details** Inbound Manager | Help

---

**Package Information:** 4150 4151

Origin: 2289 East Main Street  
Ebensburg, WA 98926, US

Destination: Returns Center  
3389 East Prichard  
New York, NY 10001, US  
888-555-1899

Package: 10" x 8" x 5"  
4 lb 2oz

Products Included: 2

Service: UPS Ground

Options: Loss Protection

Payment type: Your Company UPS Account

**Shipping Charges:**

Service Charge: \$6.30  
Service Options: \$ .35  
Total Cost: \$6.65

**Tracking results:**

Status as of 03/30/00, 02:32:30 PM Pacific Standard Time.

Status: DELIVERED  
Carrier: UPS  
Service: GROUND  
Ship Number: MAHEY211 89WDTF  
Tracking Number: 1Z3374W50100023174  
Reference Number: MBE02254  
Ship Date: Monday, March 27, 2000  
Destination: DELLEVUE WA 98006  
Expected Delivery Date: Wednesday, March 29, 2000  
Expected Delivery Time: 04:30:00 PM  
Signed by: Clement

**Original Order Information:** 4163

Order Number: A-52586-98411  
Order Date: 4/28/00, 09:58:23 AM  
Order Status: All items shipped.  
Customer Name: Jacob Lewis  
Customer ID: 00184322

**Product #1 Information:** 4164-1

Record Key: 123456-011  
Authorization Number: R-52586-98411  
Category: Audio CD  
SKU: GEFWSP150-001  
Description: Nelly Dread  
Manufacturer: Cherie Hunter Quartet  
Quantity: 1  
Price: \$12.99  
Tax: \$1.30  
Refund Amount: \$14.29  
Shipping Paid By: Customer  
Reason for Return: Customer Choice  
Customer Comments: I thought this was the Bob Marley CD, not some jazz thing.

**Product #2 Information:** 4164-2

Record Key: 123456-012  
Authorization Number: R-52586-98415  
Category: Audio CD  
SKU: GEFWSP250-581  
Description: Pink, Can't Take Me Home  
Manufacturer: Aisle Records  
Quantity: 1  
Price: \$12.99  
Tax: \$1.30  
Refund Amount: \$14.29  
Shipping Paid By: Customer  
Reason for Return: Customer Choice  
Customer Comments: I thought that this was a Pink Floyd album.

**stamps.com**

**Back** **Done**

FIG. 58

Reports - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Forward Stop Refresh Home Search Favorites History Mail Print Edit Discuss Real.com

Address <https://earthman/dc/reports/default.asp> Go

### Reports

Define Report:

Report Type: Standard 4180

Report Name: Returns by SKU 4181

Report Date: Both 4188

Report Style: Chart 4189

Date Range: Today 4190

Sort By: 4192

Primary: Not Available 4194

Secondary: Not Available 4196

Third: Not Available 4198

4182 Returns by Product Category

4183 Expected Return Volume

4184 Return Reasons by SKU

4185 No Scan

4186 Late Delivery

4187

4195

4197

4199

Preview Cancel

Done Local Internet

4200 4201

FIG. 59

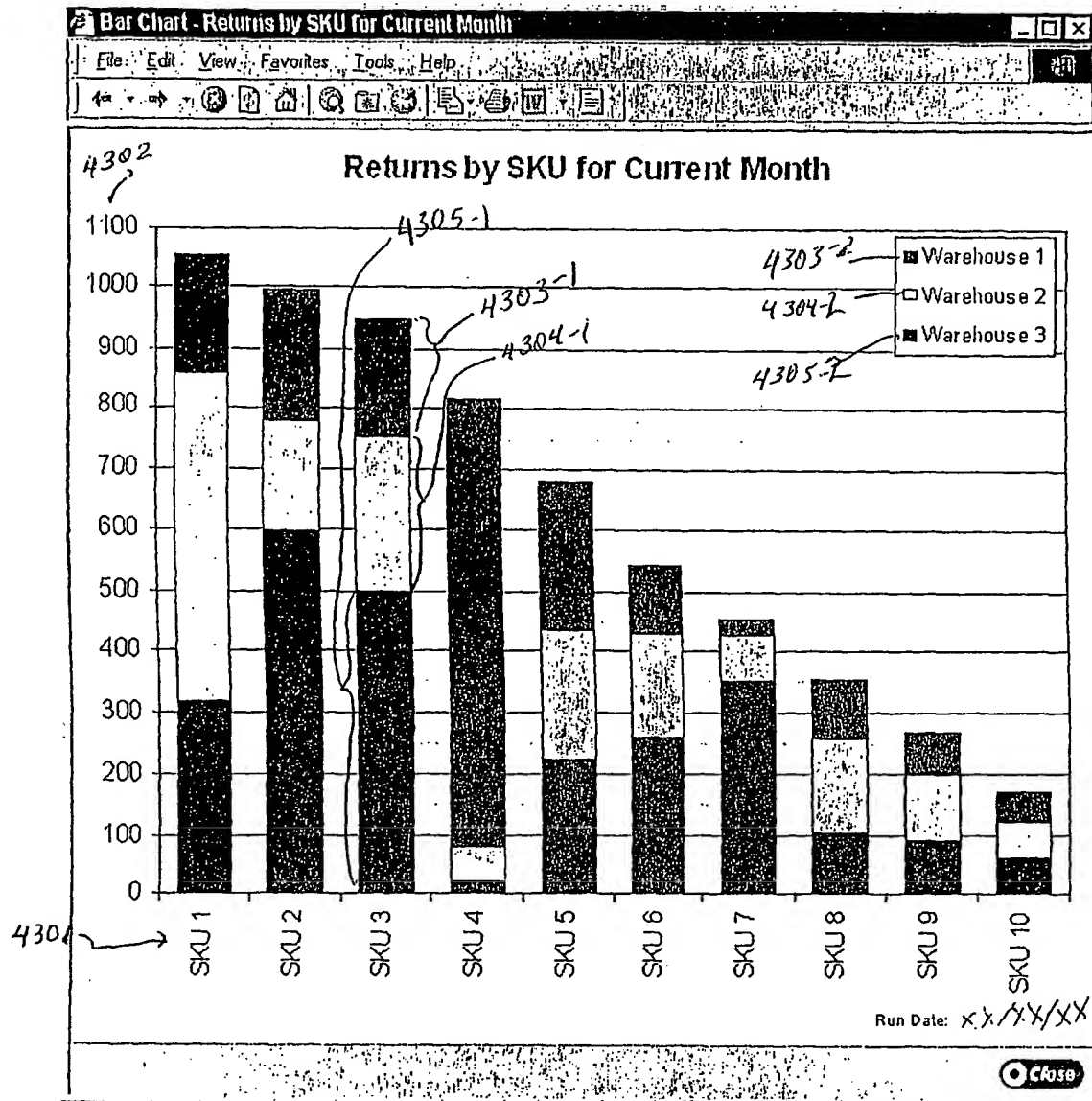


FIG. 60



Sorted: by most frequently returned item

## Returns by SKU for Current Month

SKU	Warehouse 1	Warehouse 2	Warehouse 3	Totals	Percent of Total
SKU1	311	515	230	1,056	16.8 %
SKU2	597	179	222	998	15.9 %
SKU3	499	233	215	947	15.1 %
SKU4	17	70	729	816	13.0 %
SKU5	220	201	259	680	10.8 %
SKU6	251	171	123	545	8.7 %
SKU7	335	53	64	452	7.2 %
SKU8	103	146	106	355	5.6 %
SKU9	96	111	61	268	4.3 %
SKU10	54	59	58	171	2.7 %
Totals	2484	1740	2070	6,288	

4308

FIG. 61

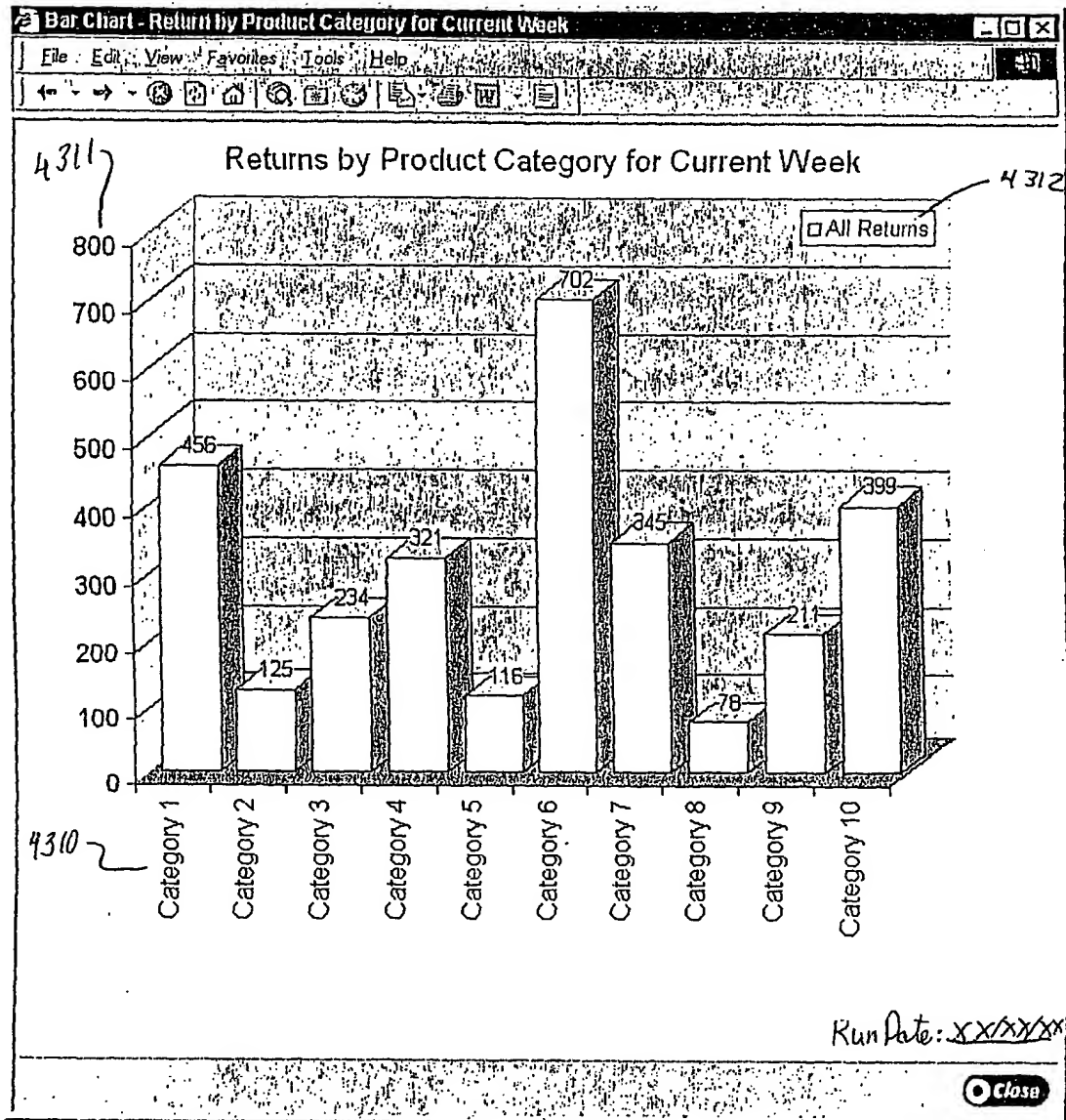


FIG. 62

Sorted: by most frequently returned product category

## Returns by Product Category for Current Week

Category	Totals	Percent of Total
Category6	702	23.5 %
Category1	456	15.3 %
Category10	399	13.4 %
Category7	345	11.6 %
Category4	321	10.7 %
Category3	234	7.8 %
Category9	211	7.1 %
Category2	125	4.2 %
Category5	116	3.9 %
Category8	78	2.6 %
Totals	2987	

FIG. 63

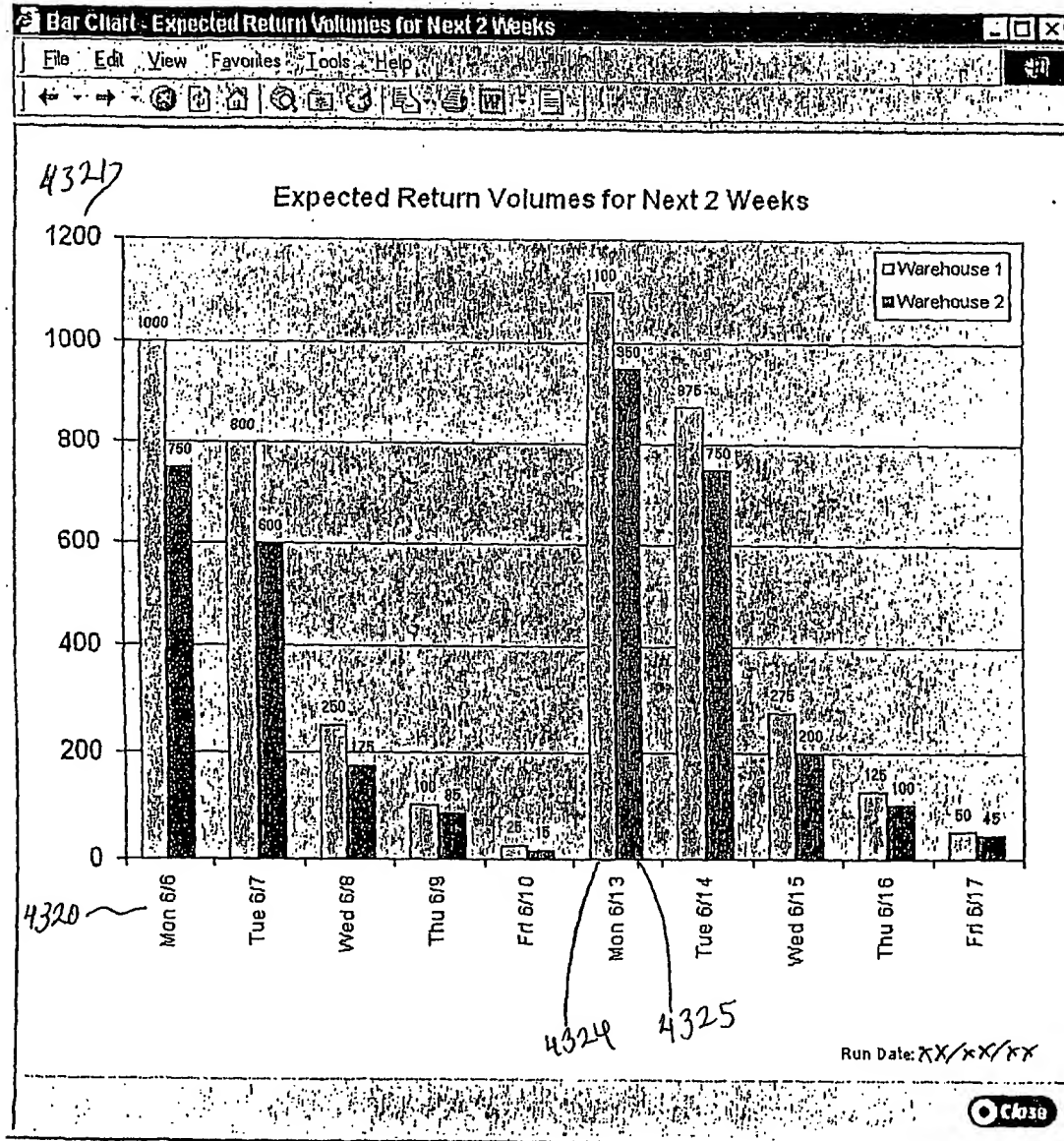


FIG. 64

Sorted: by date

## Expected Return Volume for Next Two Weeks

Date	Warehouse 1	Warehouse 2	Totals
Mon 6/5	1,000	750	1,750
Tue 6/6	800	600	1,400
Wed 6/7	256	175	431
Thur 6/8	100	85	185
Fri 6/9	25	15	40
Mon 6/12	1,100	950	2,050
Tue 6/13	875	750	1,625
Wed 6/14	275	200	475
Thur 6/15	125	100	225
Fri 6/16	50	45	95
Totals	4,607	3,672	8,276

4322

4323

FIG. 65

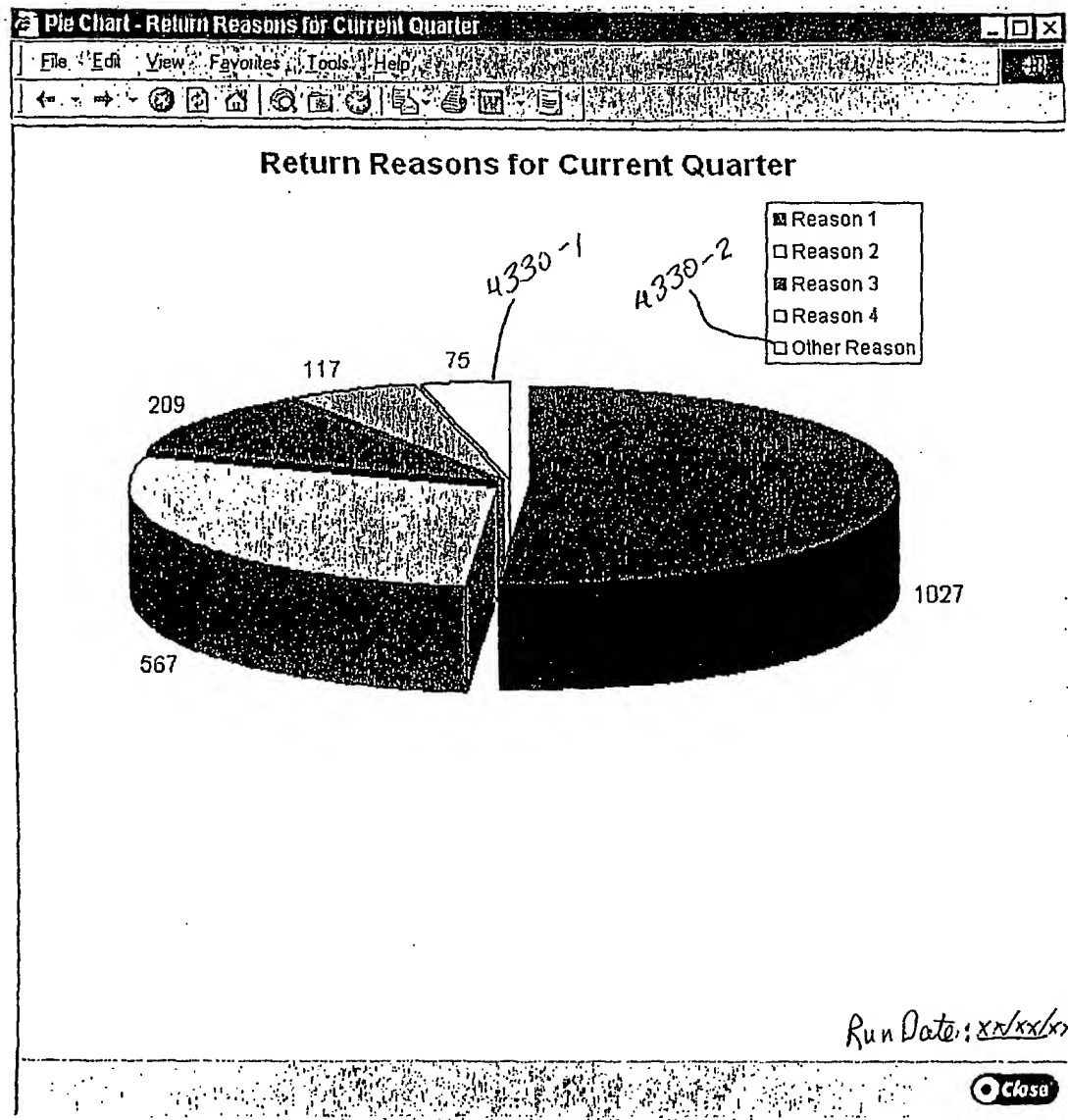


FIG. 66

Sorted: by most frequently cited return reason

Page 1 of 10

## Return Reasons for Product Category1 for Current Quarter

Reason	Totals	Percent of Total
Reason1	1,027	51.5 %
Reason2	567	28.4 %
Reason3	209	10.5 %
Reason4	117	5.9 %
All others reasons	75	3.8 %
Totals	1,995	

&lt;new page&gt;

4331  
4332 FIG. 67a

Sorted: by most frequently cited return reason

Page 2 of 10

## Return Reasons for Product Category2 for Current Quarter

Reason	Totals	Percent of Total
Reason4	1,331	41.4 %
Reason2	1,042	32.4 %
Reason1	408	12.7 %
Reason3	331	10.3 %
All others reasons	101	1.0 %
Totals	3,213	

&lt;new page&gt;

repeating for each Product Category

at end, grand total page for all Categories

FIG. 67b

Sorted: Expected Ship Date

633

Packages with No Scan for this week

4119 4121 675

Package Tracking #	Carrier/Service	Expected Ship Date	Customer	Merchant Record #
MATKP9GUZFXG3	UPS Ground	06/19/2000	MX123	20000619000001
MFTKP9GUZFXG3	UPS Ground	06/19/2000	RA333	20000619000022
MITKP9GUZFXG3	UPS Ground	06/19/2000	ST553	20000619000008
MTXKP9GUZFXG3	UPS Ground	06/20/2000	DB881	20000620003001
MT3KBP9GUZFXG	UPS Ground	06/20/2000	SG241	20000620000009
MTQPC9GUZFXG3	UPS Ground	06/21/2000	LK123	20000621000011
M8OP9VGUZFXG3	UPS Ground	06/21/2000	MK763	20000621000451
M7KP9GWUZX3	UPS Ground	06/21/2000	MX123	20000621030098
M44P9GU3ZFXG3	UPS Ground	06/21/2000	MX123	20000621001234
MPLP9GUZ5FXG3	UPS Ground	06/21/2000	RA427	20000621009876
MEKP9GUZF6XG3	UPS Ground	06/22/2000	ZL912	20000622000022
MTUP9GUZFX7G3	UPS Ground	06/22/2000	IG400	20000622000437
M6XP9GUZFXGQ3	UPS Ground	06/22/2000	DB881	20000622001204

4155

FIG. 68



Sorted: Expected Delivery Date

Late Packages for this week

Package Tracking #	Carrier/Service	Expected Dlvry Date	Status	Customer	Merchant Record #
MATKP9GUZFXG3	USPS Parcel P	06/19/2000		MX123	20000619000001
MFTKP9GUZFXG3	UPS Ground	06/19/2000	In Transit	RA333	20000619000022
MHTKP9GUZFXG3	UPS Ground	06/19/2000	In Transit	ST553	20000619000008
MTXKP9GUZFXG3	USPS Parcel P	06/20/2000		DB881	20000620003001
MT3KBP9GUZFXG	USPS Parcel P	06/20/2000		SG241	20000620000009
MTQPC9GUZFXG3	UPS Ground	06/21/2000	In Transit	LK123	20000621000011
M8OP9VGUZF6XG3	UPS Ground	06/21/2000	Delivered	MK763	20000621000451
MTKP9GWUZF6X3	UPS Ground	06/21/2000	In Transit	MX123	20000621030098
M44P9GU3ZFXG3	USPS Parcel P	06/21/2000		MX123	20000621001234
MPLP9GUZ5FXG3	UPS Ground	06/21/2000	Delivered	RA427	20000621009876
MEKP9GUZF6XG3	UPS Ground	06/22/2000	In Transit	ZL912	20000622000022
MTUP9GUZFX7G3	USPS Parcel P	06/22/2000		IG400	20000622000437
M6XP9GUZFXGQ3	UPS Ground	06/22/2000	In Transit	DB881	20000622001204

FIG. 69

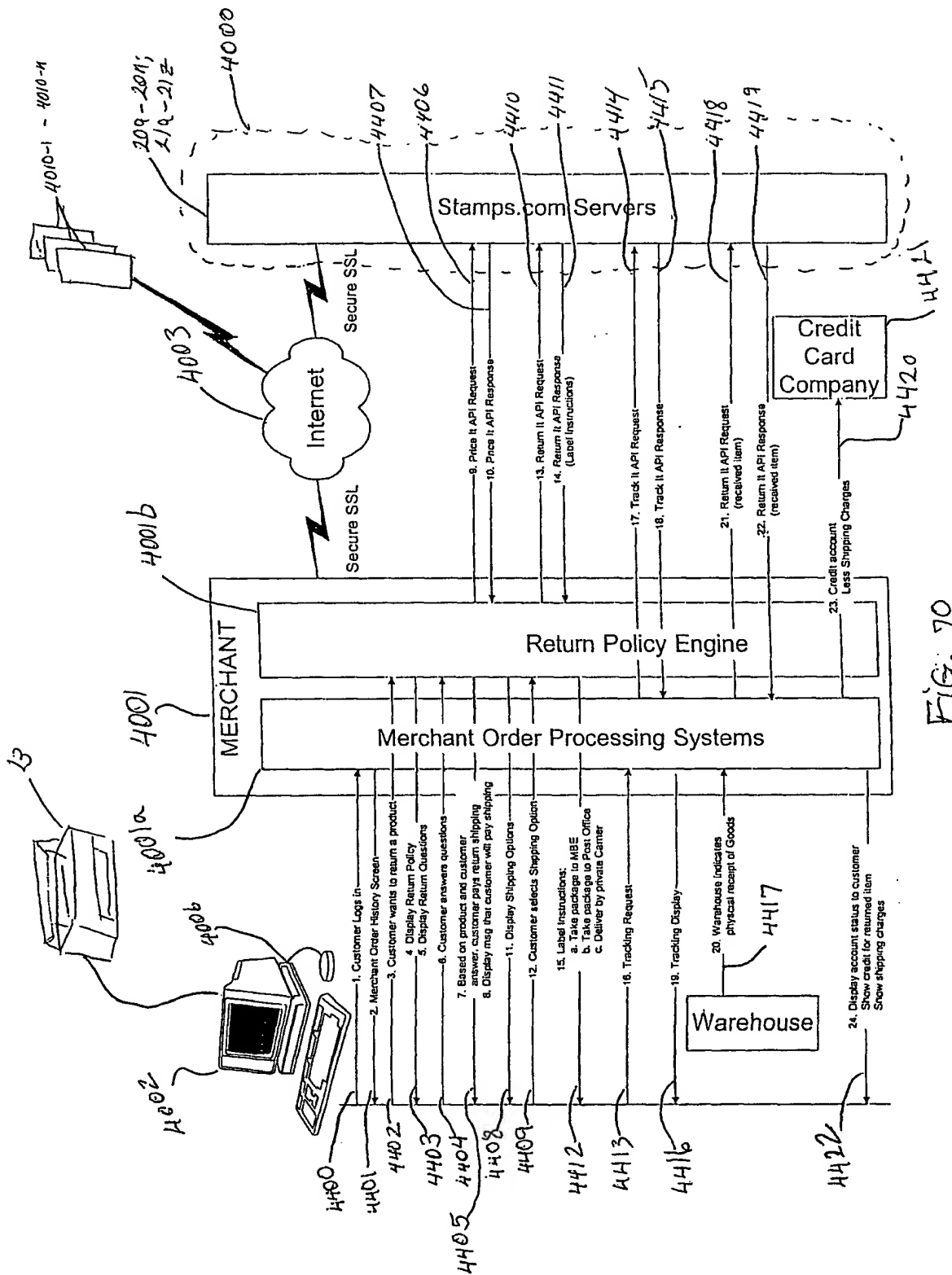


FIG. 70

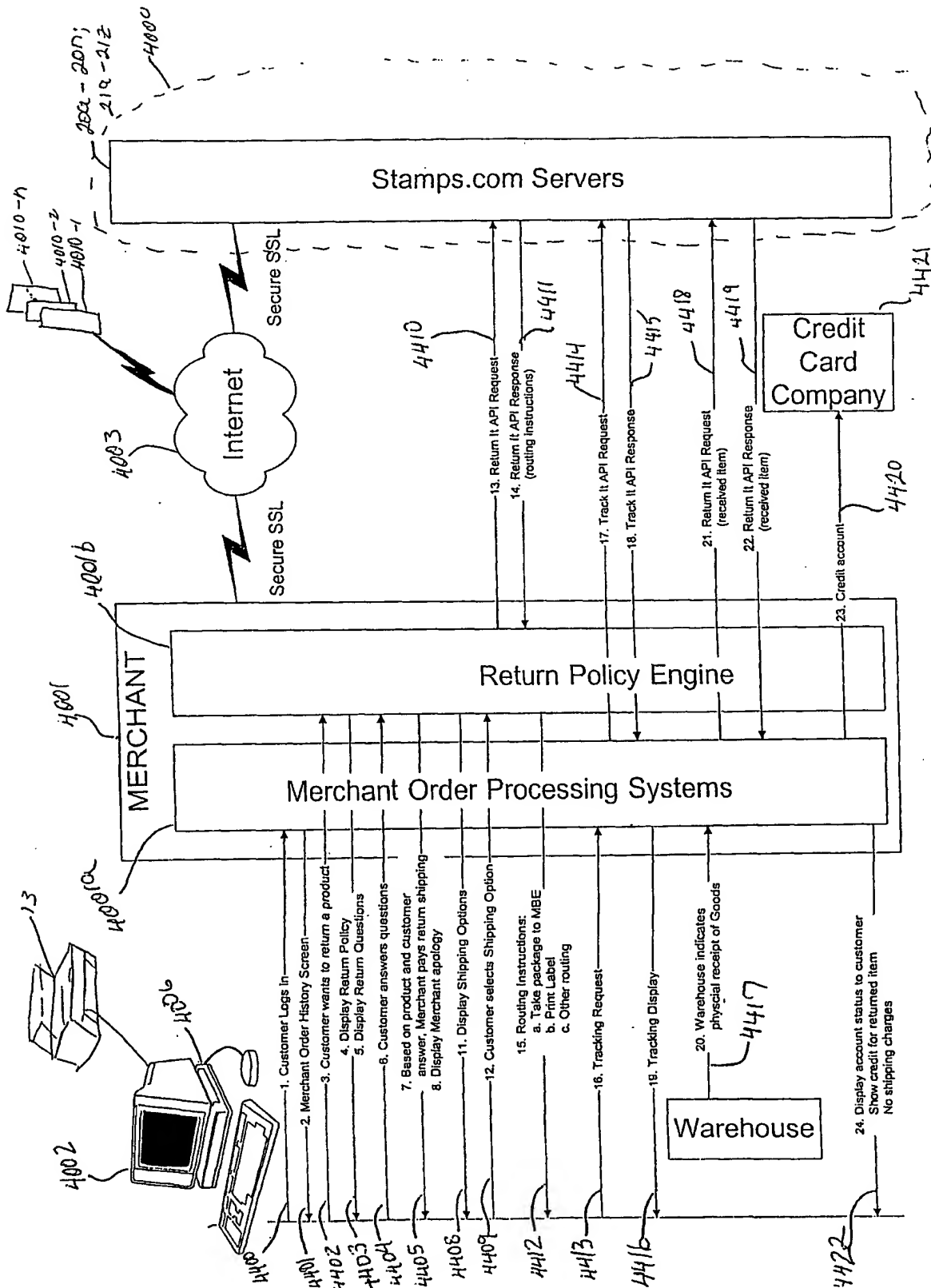


Fig. 71

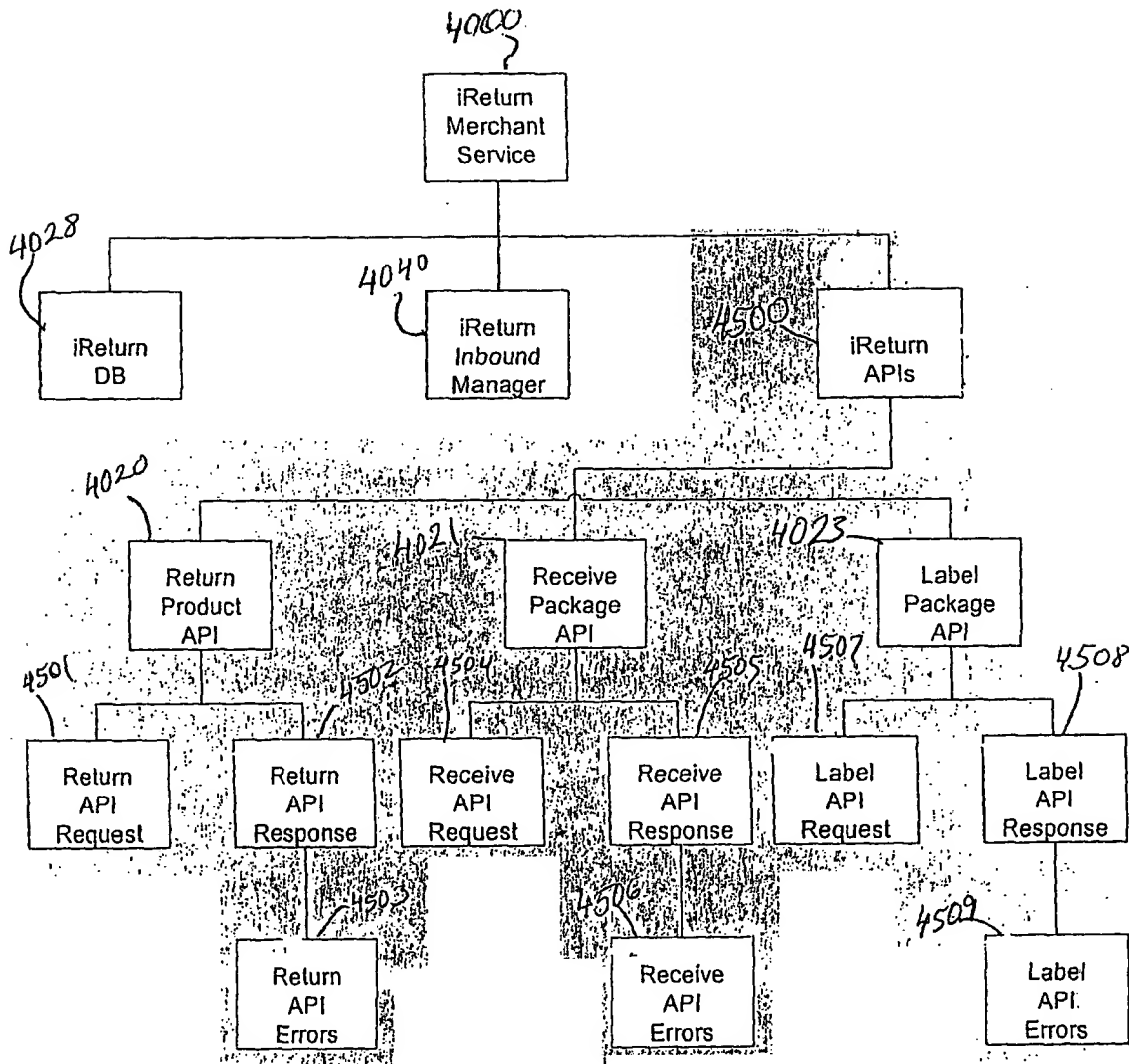


FIG. 72

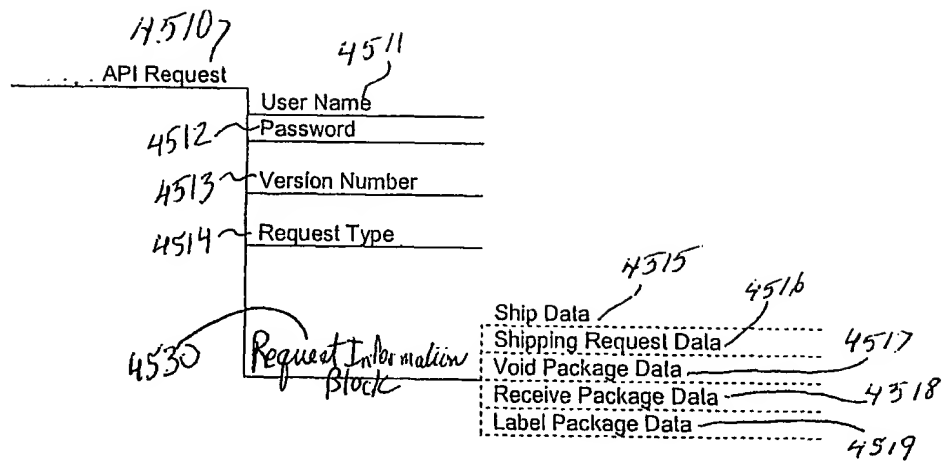


FIG. 73

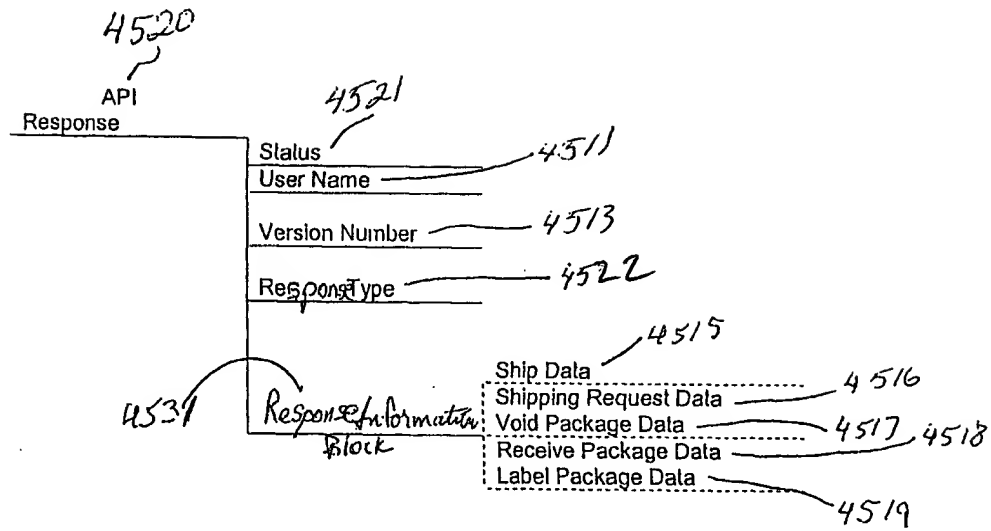


FIG. 74

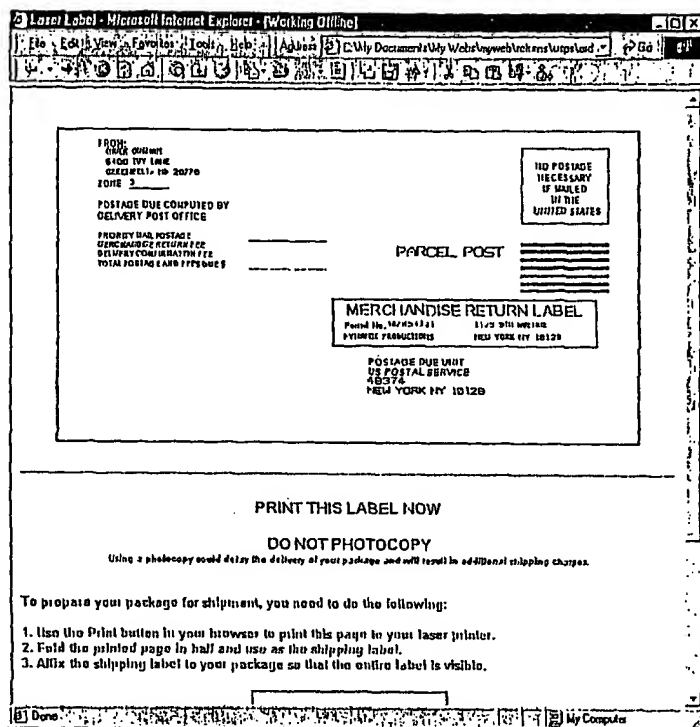


FIG. 75a

**PRINT THIS LABEL NOW****DO NOT PHOTOCOPY**

Using a photocopy could delay the delivery of your package and will result in additional shipping charges.

To prepare your parcel for shipment, you need to do the following:

Use the Print button in your browser to print this page to your laser printer.

Fold the printer page in half and use as the shipping label.

Affix the shipping label to the address side of your parcel so that the entire label is visible.

Completely cover any previous delivery address and barcode.

Do NOT overlap any adjacent side.

If tape or similar material is used to affix the label to the package it must NOT cover any part of the label where postage and fee information is to be recorded.

Obliterate any other addresses and barcodes on the outside of the parcel.

Take the parcel to a post office.

Drop in a collection box, or

Give to a postal carrier.

If a mailing acknowledgement is attached or insurance is marked on the label, the parcel must be taken to a post office.

FIG. 75b



iReturn™

Your Package Traveler: #1 of 1

This is not a shipping label. Take your package and this Traveler to a participating Mail Boxes Etc.





Shipping Addresses

<b>Return:</b> Lory Jones (425) 555-1212 Your Company 3535 Main Street Suite 500 Seattle WA 98000	<b>Destination:</b> John Doe (701) 555-1234 His Company 1234 Central Avenue Mandan ND 58554	<b>Retail Store Location:</b> Mail Boxes, Etc. 3428 Factoria Blvd. Bellevue, WA 98006  (425) 555-1234
---	--	--

Package Information

<b>Package Details:</b> 1 of 1 Carrier Box Weight to be determined	<b>Service:</b> TBD <b>Price:</b> TBD <b>Payment Type:</b> customer paid cash or credit-card
---	--

iShip™ Tracking Number

M ATKP9G UZFXG3



How to Use Your Traveler

**DO NOT PHOTOCOPY**  
 Using a photocopy could delay the processing of your package.

**To prepare your package, you need to do the following:**

- ❶ Use the Print button in your browser to print this page to your laser printer.
- ❷ Take your package and your printed Traveler to a participating Mail Boxes Etc.

**<Ad Space>**

FIG. 76

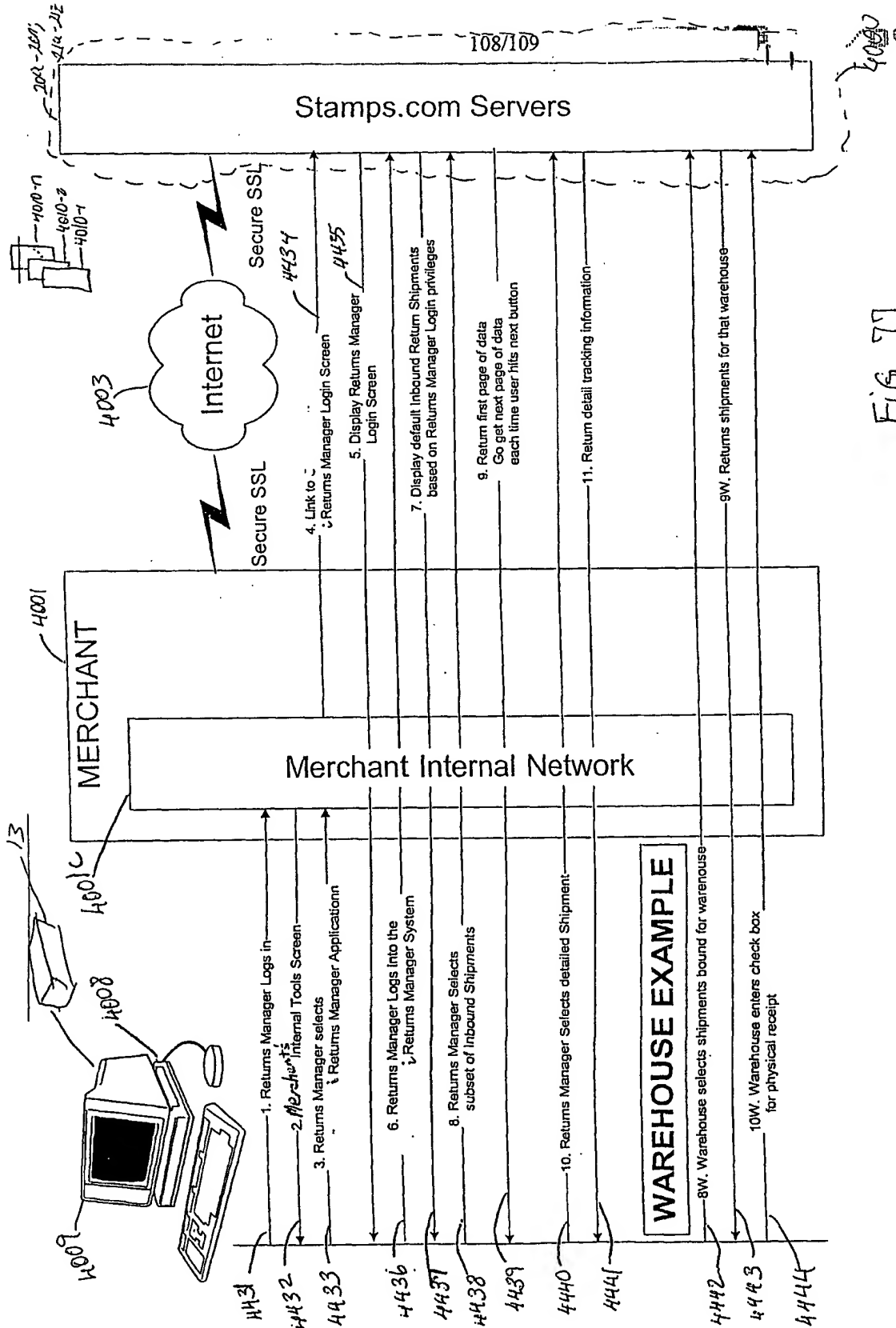
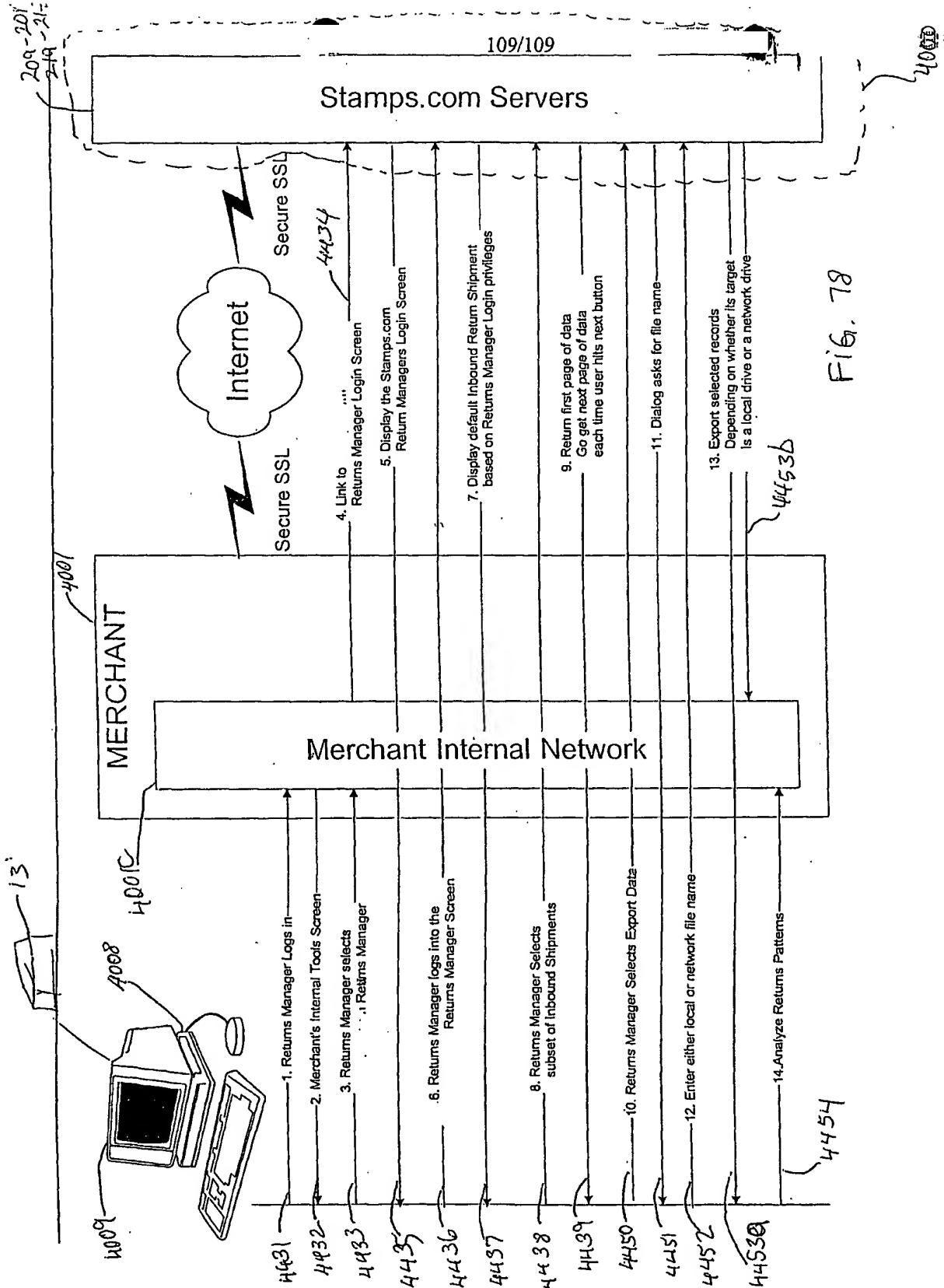


FIG. 99



# PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

# PCT

## DECLARATION OF NON-ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

(PCT Article 17(2)(a), Rules 13ter.1(c) and Rule 39)


Applicant's or agent's file reference <b>PSTM0042-PCT/MRK</b>	IMPORTANT DECLARATION	Date of mailing(day/month/year) <b>24/07/2001</b>
International application No. <b>PCT/US 01/ 09852</b>	International filing date(day/month/year) <b>27/03/2001</b>	(Earliest) Priority date(day/month/year) <b>28/03/2000</b>
International Patent Classification (IPC) or both national classification and IPC <b>G06F17/60</b>		
Applicant <b>STAMPS.COM INC. et al.</b>		

This International Searching Authority hereby declares, according to Article 17(2)(a), that **no international search report will be established** on the international application for the reasons indicated below

1. ☒ The subject matter of the international application relates to:
  - a. ☐ scientific theories.
  - b. ☐ mathematical theories
  - c. ☐ plant varieties.
  - d. ☐ animal varieties.
  - e. ☐ essentially biological processes for the production of plants and animals, other than microbiological processes and the products of such processes.
  - f. ☒ schemes, rules or methods of doing business.
  - g. ☐ schemes, rules or methods of performing purely mental acts.
  - h. ☐ schemes, rules or methods of playing games.
  - i. ☐ methods for treatment of the human body by surgery or therapy.
  - j. ☐ methods for treatment of the animal body by surgery or therapy.
  - k. ☐ diagnostic methods practised on the human or animal body.
  - l. ☐ mere presentations of information.
  - m. ☐ computer programs for which this International Searching Authority is not equipped to search prior art.
2. ☐ The failure of the following parts of the international application to comply with prescribed requirements prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:
 

☐ the description
☐ the claims
☐ the drawings
3. ☐ The failure of the nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence listing to comply with the standard provided for in Annex C of the Administrative Instructions prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:
 

☐ the written form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.  
☐ the computer readable form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.
4. Further comments:

Name and mailing address of the International Searching Authority  European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL-2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer <b>Mar'a Rodr'guez Nõvoa</b>
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## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No. PCT/US 01/09852

FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM PCT/ISA/ 203

The subject-matter claimed in claims 39-76 falls under the provisions of Article 17(2)(a)(i) and Rule 39.1(iii), PCT, such subject-matter relating to a method of doing business.

Claims 1-38 and 115-169, and claims 77-114 relate to a conventional computer system, respectively a conventional computer product for performing the business method of claims 39-76. Although these claims do not literally belong to the method category, they essentially claim protection for the same commercial effect as the method claims. The International Searching Authority considers that searching this subject-matter would serve no useful purpose. It is not at present apparent how the subject-matter of the present claims may be considered defensible in any subsequent examination phase in front of the EPO as International Preliminary Examining Authority with regard to the provisions of Article 33(1) PCT (novelty, inventive step); see also Guidelines B-VII, 1-6.

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that claims relating to inventions in respect of which no international search report has been established need not be the subject of an international preliminary examination (Rule 66.1(e) PCT). The applicant is advised that the EPO policy when acting as an International Preliminary Examining Authority is normally not to carry out a preliminary examination on matter which has not been searched. This is the case irrespective of whether or not the claims are amended following receipt of the search report or during any Chapter II procedure. If the application proceeds into the regional phase before the EPO, the applicant is reminded that a search may be carried out during examination before the EPO (see EPO Guideline C-VI, 8.5), should the problems which led to the Article 17(2) declaration be overcome.

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